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MARCH 50¢

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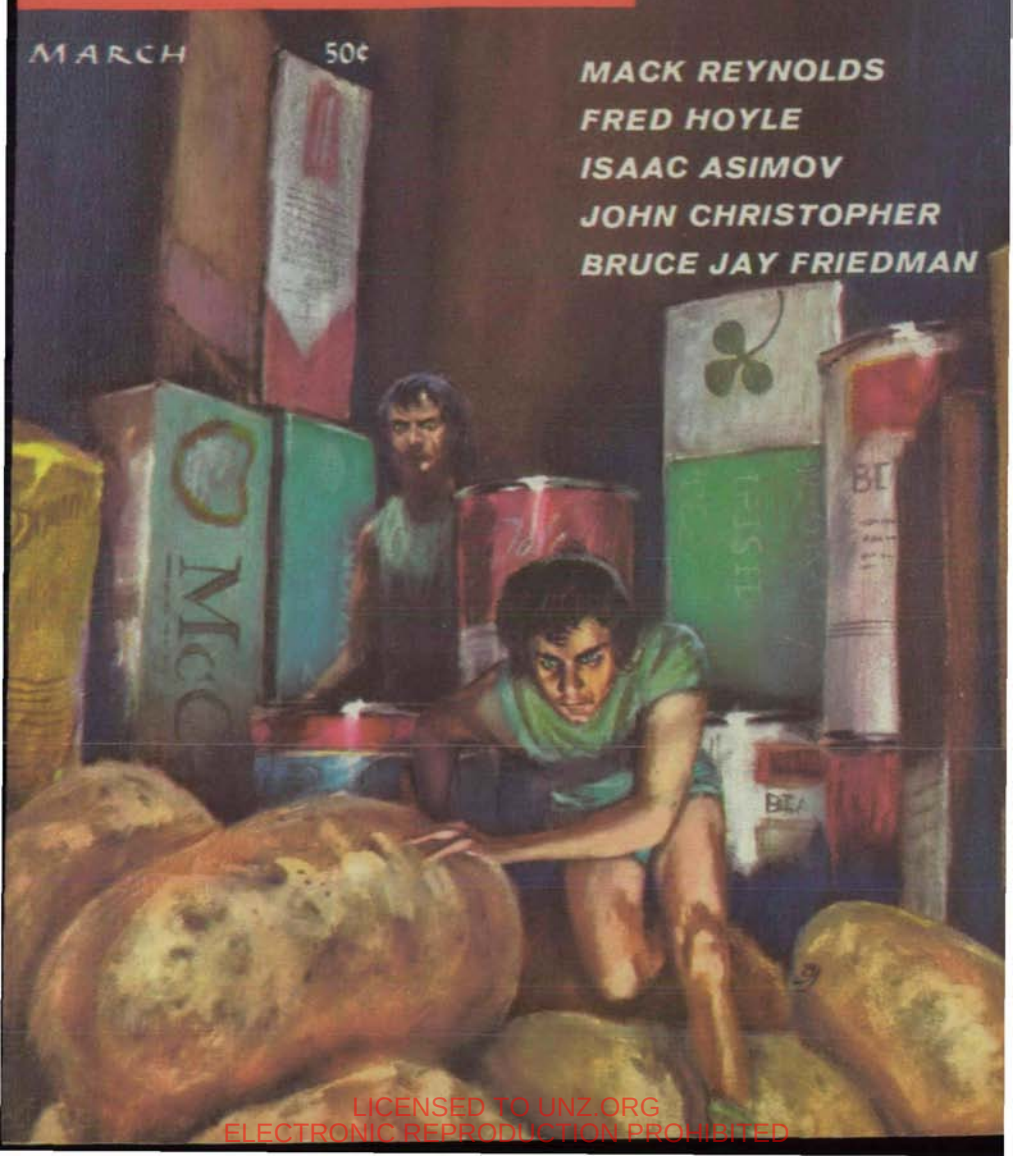

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

MARCH *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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Mr. (Arthur) Jean Cox's first (and only) story for F&SF appeared sixteen years ago (TWILIGHT PLANET, July 1951). Anthony Boucher called it "an example of perfectly sustained mood." We intend to make every effort to reduce the inordinately long lapses between his stories, for, while Mr. Cox may not be a prolific writer (at least not for us), he is certainly a very good one—as evidenced by the haunting and moving tale you are about to read.

THE SEA CHANGE

by Jean Cox

HE LEFT HIS CAR PARKED AT the top of the bluff, the face of which fell a sheer two hundred feet to the water. He stood on the verge, looking down. Just a step would do it. He would go twisting through the air in a slow somersault (so he imagined) and strike the sand directly below with a resounding and sickening blow—the only blow that it was in his power to strike.

But, no, he hadn't come here for that. Not exactly. He would have to find a slower way down to the water. He did, working his way cautiously (so as not to fall and hurt himself) down a scraggly, ankle-twisting path, dirt spilling into the sides of his shoes, to the beach. He stood in the sand at the water's edge and looked about. Yes, this was the place. His father had come here ten years ago and drowned himself. James Gordon had been happily married and popular with women; he had had money, health and wide social respect, and was famous in more than one line of scientific research: marine biology and biochemistry, most prominently. Everything he did was a success, and he did a great many things. And yet he had come to this lonely beach one early morning, bringing with him certain glass jars and bottles, the visible evidence of a life's work. He had unscrewed the caps from the bottles and jars, and, cradling them gently in his arms, had waded out into the wa-

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ter, returning their contents and himself to the sea. His body had never been found.

And now that man's son and namesake had come to follow in his footsteps. The second James Gordon had not been so fortunate as the first, neither in love nor work. Certainly, not in the former. And although he had carefully not followed his father's line (he was a social worker, but somehow hadn't done anyone much good), he had nevertheless been overshadowed by him. Everyone had drawn the inevitable comparison between his lack of distinction and his father's brilliant career—a career which was qualified, it is true, by that shadowy interrogation mark with which it terminated, but which seemed only to make it all the more interesting and worthy of comment. And he, himself, had drawn the contrast more frequently than anyone else. At least, he had until recently, when he had run for election to the city council and had been ignominiously defeated by an older opponent who, in addition to mocking his youthful idealism—his lofty ideals of social co-operation, his hatred of the loneliness and isolation of modern society, the indifference which everyone feels towards his fellow man—had popularized that comparison which had been confined to his small circle of friends and associates. The public had shown their approval of his opponent's scorn by giving him the lowest number of votes received by any candidate in the history of the town. They had shown him what indifference was, and what loneliness and isolation could be. Well, he would show them that he could do one thing at least that his father had done, and do it just as well.

These thoughts he scanned without examining—they were very familiar—as he stood looking out over the water, which was slate-colored, chalk-streaked, but without anything written there that he could read. A bird scudded across the waste. He followed it with his eye and saw a white speck of a sail on the horizon, poignant against the mixed gloom and brightness of the sea-scape. He watched it with an aching wistfulness. It dipped suddenly and was gone, as if it had vanished beneath the waves, and he was alone again. A cold wind came off the water and he shivered, hands shoved deep into his pockets, like a little boy. But time must be passing . . . for the crescent of pale sand upon which he stood was slowly being eclipsed by the dark body of water.

He began plucking at his clothes, stripped himself naked—why not?—and dropped the clothes into a rather pathetic, lifeless-looking heap on the sand. He waded out into the water, which was not as cold as he had feared, and continued out until it was up

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to his waist, then lay forward and began to swim. He swam well enough, ducking his face and raising it with every stroke, being careful not to swallow too much water. His plan was to swim out until he reached the limit of his strength, and then . . . then that would be it. He glanced back once or twice and saw his car high on the cliff. How friendly it looked! But that was weakness. He swam on.

It took him a shorter time than he had expected to become tired. He was not far enough out yet. He wanted to make sure that his body, also, was never found. He swam on, resolutely. The tiredness in his arms and legs increased, dully at first. His chest ached. He gasped for breath. The waves broke over his head. He spewed water from his mouth. But still he swam. Soon, his arms were almost too sluggish to move, too heavy to lift. He could no longer swim, the best he could do would be to stay afloat. He did for a while, then sank. He reached the air, sucked it in, sank again—and again, convulsively trying to reach the surface. He was not conscious of any desperate will to live asserting itself, as it supposedly always did, at this last moment. He wished only to escape the pain and the immediate horror of suffocation. And he wished to escape the panic. But none of that was possible. His lungs burned, his limbs were tortured by the racking waves. He was gulping in the water now. It was very painful, like swallowing pebbles. The panic grew and as it did, that part of his consciousness which was detached became more distinctly so. It looked on with a disinterested clarity as he struggled in the close darkness, observing remotely that this was the end of his life-story. He had written *finis* to his autobiography.

He stirred, smiled and looked around, like an awakened Adam. It was morning—a beautiful morning, with the light streaming through the water and rippling and wavering on the surface not far above his head—and he was lying nakedly but comfortably enough on a kind of stone couch on the floor of the sea. He moved and stretched and found with a complacent sort of surprise that he needed to draw no breath. And in moving, he twisted easily about in the water and made a further discovery. Something was attached to his back, between the shoulder blades: a dark brown, leathery-looking flap, a foot and a half across; something like a ray-fish, he thought, from what he could see of it. The thing was fastened to him securely—he could feel a tightness back there—and yet, somehow, he felt no disgust or fear. He could see that it was swelling and falling slowly, as if it were breathing—breathing for him, of course. This thought

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seemed to have the authority of a perception. It was extracting oxygen from the water and passing it directly into his bloodstream. That was marvelous, no doubt, but not a very exciting marvel. Rather, he felt calm, deeply calm, as if he had taken a particularly potent tranquilizer. He felt . . . yes, he even felt a kind of gratitude for his friend. But he wondered, somewhat distantly, what it expected of *him*—for this must be one of those symbiotic relationships one sometimes read about. He supposed he would soon find out.

He stepped forward from his couch, floated, swam in a graceful circle. This underwater Eden was very beautiful. The landscape was dominated by rocks of many sizes and shapes, mottled and striated with subdued and pastel tints, their hard contours softened by an uneven but lush growth of plants and by the drifting lights and shadows which played across them. Many kinds of fish, none of which he could identify, swam everywhere, some very close to him, as if unafraid. Like Adam, he would have to name them. He felt wonderfully buoyant, confident and expectant, as if it were the beginning of the world.

He noticed some odd objects here and there, like small moons scattered among the constellations of starfish. They were clams of various sizes; some very large and others even larger: one foot, two, even three or four feet, in diameter. He went from each to each, tapping curiously on their shells. Surely, these were not a standard feature of marine life? Not far away, propped almost upright against an outcropping of rock was what at first looked like a great circular stone, but which he found, on moving closer, to be a clam even larger than the others—as much as eight feet across the face, and encrusted with coral and garnished with sensuous sea-anemones. What sort of pearl could *it* contain? He touched the crack at the edge, ran his finger down it and felt an anticipatory thrill—of awe? of fear, that the shell might open? or what?—tingling through him. He snatched his hand away and stepped back, contemplating the ponderous shell. Here was a mystery, indeed. What could it mean?

As he wondered, a fish, slender, and long as an arrow, came sailing by between him and the great clam. His startled eye followed its flight and saw it pause, as if pointing—at a spot not far from him where the skeleton of a man sat on a kind of natural throne. The skeleton of a drowned man, most likely. Strange that he hadn't seen it before, as he must have moved by it very closely once or twice. The arrow-shaped fish darted forward suddenly, touched the skeleton and swam away. And he saw that other fish were swimming to

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it, nudging it and moving away, and that a liquid light, through some movement of the water overhead, played about it. He swam to it, himself, and as he approached it, knew what it was. The skeleton of his father. The thought presented itself to him so easily and naturally that it seemed self-evident, like a recognition. He crouched before the skeleton, in a posture made easy by the water, and examined it.

"Full fathoms five, my father lies." Well, not quite. "Of his bones is coral made." Not quite that, either, although there were, here and there, many little bumps —molluscs, or barnacles, he supposed; he wasn't sure. "These are pearls that were his eyes." Certainly not that, although, peering closely, there *was* something . . . something in the skull, almost like eyes. Perhaps they were. The eyes, say, of some kind of fish that had claimed the hollow shell as a lodging.

There is nothing about him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change,
Into something rare and strange.

This was certainly true, for he began to make out that the skeleton was alive with sea-creatures. That was to be expected, no doubt, a thing of nature to which he could hardly take exception. They had taken up residence in its skull, ribcage and loins. A beard-like fringe, of seaweed and perhaps of that netting which hangs beneath a jellyfish, cascaded down from inside the skull and partly over the chest, giving the skeleton a patriarchal appearance. It was quite a collage. Fish came as he studied it and gave it inquisitive and curious nudges.

He saw too that a network of fibres ran from, or into, the skull and from, or into, the chest cavity and pelvic region; and he saw that these pale or white fibres, whether of vegetative or animal matter he didn't know, ran the lengths of the arms and legs, to the feet and hands. One of the hands, the left, rested on the sea of the throne-like rock near him. He experimentally touched it, lifted it. The hand and arm remained intact. The bony fingers, which had been splayed out, drooped somewhat about his fleshy fingers, with the slightest possible pressure. An action of gravity, of course, but rather unpleasant. He stepped away, his hand still in the white fingers, pulling on them. The hand and arm remained intact still as the skeleton leaned forward and shifted position with this tug. He went back several steps and the skeleton was pulled forward and into an upright position. He disengaged his fingers then and snatched his hand away, but the effigy remained standing, with the arm still languidly outstretched. And it even took one or two steps forward, as if

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from sheer inertia, or to balance itself.

He and the skeleton stood confronting each other in a motionless tableau. Something beat within the rib-cage of the skeleton—and he felt something beating within his own rib-cage, frantically, as if trying to get out. His heart. The skeleton's hand moved, the palm extended towards him, as if in appeal, as if to say, Be not afraid. And he wasn't afraid. His heart quieted, as if touched by something soothing and calming.

The skeleton faced him from about five feet away. He saw that he had been right: it *was* alive with sea-creatures. He could see them moving, wiggling, gently stirring the water and maintaining the structure in an upright position. Perhaps, too, the fibres had relaxed or contracted. The white arm moved again, in a gesture which would have had, if Gordon had made it, the crude significance of a semaphoric signal, but which was now almost overbearingly expressive: When he whose shell? shape? whose shape we bear came, he brought with him the seeds and spores, the life-giving juices. These words sounded in Gordon's own inner voice, but hesitantly, as if he were reading aloud, or translating from a foreign text. His inner voice added, in a quieter, more familiar and fluent tone: *He?* When *he* came? It must mean my father. I wonder if it knows . . . A fish swam by, eyeing him: We recognize you. The skeleton spread both arms, indicating the surrounding . . . terrain? No, the tribes of floating and darting fish, the teeming sea-life—which suddenly effloresced, rose up in an aquatic display of its numbers and diversity and wheeled and swirled in concert a moment about the little place in which they stood, then subsided and dispersed. And there came to be, conveyed the skeleton, that which you see, the harmonious thing, the hive.

The white hand made the slightest gesture, and he was conscious of the flap on his back. A claim was being made on him, as if to say, We gave you life. They needed him. But for what? The skeleton lifted a hand, spread its fingers. Your hands are needed, your supple strength and easy skill. The skeleton moved nearer and, reaching out, touched him lightly on the chest. Your warm blood is needed. His blood? That must be because . . . Because its steady warmth makes possible your . . . His what? Your individual mobile intelligence. Was that all? Gordon sensed more, something left unsaid, like a great blank. But he could glean no hint of what it could be, though he searched for it in the skeleton's posture, gesture and surroundings.

The hand moved again, Come and you shall see.

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They swam together, the skeleton with a spectral elegance, and he was shown the hive. As they swam, Gordon studied the other, the *pastiche*. It wasn't his father, of course; he hadn't thought of it as being that. In fact, it wasn't a person at all, but a kind of committee; a committee which, oddly enough, was consulted every now and then by the other citizens of the community. Or were they merely giving it helpful nudges along its line of swim? Such thoughts as these, and others, skirted the edges of his mind, but there was too much to see and to feel to attend to them.

It was borne in upon him, by a thousand bits of fresh evidence, that the terrain, with its grottoes and lush plant-life, was beautiful. And that the swarming species of fish were also beautiful, each in its appropriate way. He noted with surprise that fish of different kinds were swimming together and wondered what his father would have thought of that, for he sympathized now with his father's noble fascination with the sea. He, himself, could spend his life here studying the many forms which life had taken and never exhaust the treasures of the hive. What would his father have thought on seeing fish engaged in communal activities, such as gathering, storing and distributing plant food? And what would he have made of those flocks of tame-looking, uniform fish tended and herded by a few other more authoritative and varied fish? But through some subtle alchemy of sympathy, that same silent process which enabled him to respond so fully to the expressive gestures of his host, he saw what his father, peering down from the other side of that wavering curtain above, could never have seen. That to the fish, separated only by a thin film from their wild state, nearly every movement was a pleasure. That the molluscs and other fixed creatures, though likewise filmed over with the pale cast of community belonging, were enjoying lives of gratified palates and reproductive rapture. He wondered if that defined the boundaries of their lives; if they ever felt fear, for instance, or if there was ever anything of which to be afraid.

He had appetites, too, and food was brought to him on a half-shell by toddling crabs. There was a variety of meats which he could not identify, but which tasted absolutely delicious, despite their being eaten in a solution of salt water. He half-suspected that they were synthetic, and that his appetite was being adjusted. There were greens and something sweet, a pastille which he named manna. He ate voraciously, enjoying it all. Swallowing was at once natural and strange, as if the mechanism had been altered, or as if his windpipe were closed. Perhaps it was.

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And his lungs didn't feel as if they were filled with water. Perhaps they weren't. The hive had evolved a strange art and science of the flesh.

He had finished his meal and was licking his fingers when he received an answer of sorts to the question he had lately asked himself. He couldn't tell how he first became aware of the danger. It was like some change in the tempo of movement around him, or like the introduction of a sinister anticipatory *motif* in the musical score of a melodrama; but he *was* aware before he saw the supple shadow gliding swiftly across the uneven terrain. This was a fish of which he knew the name. The fear which shook him and took his mentors by surprise was again smoothly quieted. Calm washed through him. But though the physical fear vanished, a kind of disembodied fear was left behind; almost an aesthetic fear, which permitted him to admire the chilling effect of the predator, with its white underbelly and gnashing crescent of a mouth, its effortless strength and easy cruising speed. There seemed to be some danger, judging by the behavior of the hive, but nothing with which it couldn't cope. The myriad drifting fish were sinking quietly into and among the vegetation and the rocks, but the posture of the skeletal structure at his side suggested caution more than fear.

As he watched, he saw two forms rise from the bottom and approach the shark from opposite directions. A nondescript-looking fish swam towards it boldly from the front, while a leathery-flap of a fish, very much like the one on his back, came upon it swiftly, stealthily, from the rear. The shark turned aside toward the heroic commonplace citizen of the hive and flickered upon it. The smaller fish was suddenly impaled in the murderous jaws, its tail protruding gruesomely; a gnash or two, and the tail had folded out of sight and there was a murky, staining, vaporous clot of red. The shark sailed on, directly over head. Its shadow fell across Gordon and the skeleton. And Gordon saw, as it went by, that it had a passenger. The flap was attached to its back. The killer turned to one side, hesitated dangerously—for a shark, quickly exhausting the oxygen from the water around it, must move to live—lashed forward a few yards and then poised again, this time too long. It sank downward and out of sight. As it did so, the population of the hive flushed up out of the undergrowth. Gordon saw many of its members converging quickly upon the spot where the great fish had gone down, while the others resumed their accustomed ways.

The friendly skeleton beckoned and they moved on, convoyed by fish, to explore the little community. Gordon found that the hive

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was held in a shallow bowl about a quarter of a mile across. It was, he discovered, a bowl on a shelf—for there was a steep drop-off a few yards beyond the outer margin, a drop which went down, down into impenetrable gloom. They, his host and himself and company, swam around the perimeter of the hive. Pausing once or twice, Gordon became aware of something. Coming from outside the pale, there was a cacophony of voices, sounds, vibrations: muffled hoots, screechings, bubblings, diffused and deadened slaps—such sounds as one might imagine the drowning to make. But from inside the charmed circle there was a harmony. He could hear it now. He had been dimly and fragmentarily aware of it from the first. He had heard melodious noises from various points of the compass, almost like echoes of a watchman's call, "All's well! All's well!" But now he could tell that there were a great many voices and that they might be likened to a choir, each distinct and distinctive voice singing only its part, but all fitting together in harmony. It was beautiful, extraordinarily comforting and right. He paused a long while, listening to it, and was surprised by an upwelling of tender sympathy. The salt water swam before his eyes like tears. Here, in this little place, was being realized that soft dream of peace, of brotherhood, of community-living free from all harsh strife and competition, which had been one of the great dreams of mankind. All these multitudinous creatures were living together in something like love, exchanging . . . exchanging . . . juices of certain kinds, probably: chemicals, hormones, homeopathic substances. That was why the fish so frequently 'nudged' the skeleton, no doubt—just as the ants and bees, living together in their communities, touchingly exchange tiny droplets with each other and with the queen, which bind them together chemically and without which they cannot live. For if the queen bee should die without a replacement—

Fish scattered from him, explosively, in all directions. He paused in surprise, then watched in admiration as they re-grouped in swirling loose formations, their sides turning and flashing in the moving water, like a forest of silver leaves.

His guide conducted him back towards the center of the hive and they came to that crop of large clams he had seen on awakening. The skeleton indicated them and, in a comprehensive gesture, Gordon and himself. We have desired to create a form like yours. The hand drooped, conveying disappointment, which Gordon put into words as, But without success. His host bent over one of the clams, a foot in diameter. Here is one such

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failure. We grieve for it. A chalk-white finger lightly tapped the face of the clam, which responsively opened. Inside, embedded in the milky white flesh, was a red and pink splotch, like the yolk of an egg that had gone bad, and which Gordon found, on closer examination, to be a curled human foetus. It seemed imperfect to his unpracticed eye, even in that early stage of development. But, still, such near success was a marvel. What could the hive have used as a model? Probably, he surmised, the cells, the chromosomes and genes of his father, poor unwitting Prometheus.

The inclination in the form of the skeleton suggested a deep sadness. We cannot suffer this imperfect thing to grow. And there was a gesture, a poignant appeal. Gordon understood. His fingers fortuitously touched upon a sharp stone, like a chiselled arrowhead, which lay nearby. He picked it up, poised it . . . and paused. Strange. He looked around, trying to place what was wrong. It was as if someone were holding his breath, but there was no breath to be held. Everything was as usual. Fish floated silently by. From beyond the pale there came random cacophonous noises, faint and thin in the distance. The skeleton was crouched at his side, face downward, patiently waiting. Nothing wrong. He brought the stone down sharply, performed the abortion by removing the detachable mess. It was over. The clam shut. The skeleton moved. The harmonious hum of the hive sounded all around.

He glanced towards the great clam eight feet across the face and wondered if his host would show him what *that* contained. But not yet, apparently, for he was taken in another direction and for some distance, till they came to a place on the perimeter of the hive. It was a circle of white sand, like an arena, unevenly bordered by rocks. The skeleton drifted downward and stood upright on the margin of the sand. Gordon imitated the action. The skeleton's attitude expressed expectancy. We will show you something else. The hand lifted again in a gesture of sadness and of appeal to him, that very same appeal as of a moment ago. Another failure to be dispensed with? puzzled Gordon, looking around. The water was so clear that he could see for hundreds of yards. The touch of a bony finger recalled him to his companion, the touch somehow also reminding him of their previous conversation. We have brought forth a thing-like-you (man-form, emended Gordon), but—The skeleton struggled to express something, and failed. It fell back, its limbs moved haphazardly and without relation to each other, as if it were about to fly apart. The action was ugly and grotesque, the contrast to his usual uncanny expressiveness disconcert-

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ing. There was something which could not be conveyed, something too horrible and menacing. Treachery. Cannibalism. Incest. Fratricide. These were the ideas among which Gordon groped. Whatever it was, it was far more terrifying than the shark. Perhaps, he thought, they had bred something peculiarly dangerous to the hive. The skeleton stilled its motions, became coherent again and stood upright. It pointed, Look.

And Gordon looked. Something was swimming towards them from the distance, arms and legs working. A man-form, indeed. He watched, fascinated, and as he watched, he became aware that the whole area of the hive was somehow darkening, so that the white arena stood out in brilliant, inviting contrast. The man-creature corrected its course slightly, so that it approached more directly. It grew larger, stilled its vigorous motions and came gliding easily to the far edge of the arena, where it touched the sandy bottom and likewise stood regarding them—or him, more likely—across a distance of some twenty feet. It seemed large for a man, but was perhaps no more than six feet tall. It was very thick, with a flat chest, and its limbs were disproportionately heavy, as if fashioned by a bad sculptor. It was as white as the belly of the shark, but had a large crop of jet black hair, from beneath which its eyes, which seemed to be grey, watched. Its eyes were the most human thing about it, so successfully human that they might have passed for Gordon's own; but its sexual organs—Gordon averted *his* eyes—were a failure, being incomplete.

Both he and the creature stood looking on for some time, and then approached each other. That is, the man-thing moved forward towards him, slowly and hesitantly, and Gordon, so as not to appear afraid, even with some idea of facing down the creature, although he was unsure of what was expected of him, stepped forward also. They stopped about eight feet from each other, both upright, with their toes trailing in the white sand. The sounds of the ocean washed around and over them, sounds from beyond the pale of the hive. And again something was strange. Gordon sensed that lapse, that curious suspension, as of a held breath. And he knew what it was—it must be that. He was alone. Alone, except for the hooded flap on his back, which was breathing heavily but easily, as if asleep. Alone, because the skeleton had moved back, had faded completely into the shadows of the dark ferns and rocks, and no other fish were visible. The hive was no longer holding converse with him. He could hear no harmonious music. He was alone, except for the dead white thing which faced him.

Of course. This is why they

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needed him. *They*—it, the hive—cannot kill this thing. They cannot kill what is of themselves, what they have brought forth. Some biological inhibition prevents them, one of those hidden feelings, obscure but absolutely peremptory. Such things were not unknown in the animal world; he had read of them. The most ferocious species were unable to kill their own kind; or, fighting, were unable to deliver the *coup de grace* to a fallen, related foe. Such must be the case here. They could plan, but couldn't execute. He remembered the horror the skeleton had been unable to express. What had occasioned it, but the fact that this thing they had created did not share those inhibitions: It must be killing, eating members of the hive. That's why they needed *him*. His teeth were blunt, his hands were weak, but he could kill what they couldn't. Human beings can kill anything. Mothers, fathers, brothers—none are safe. Kinship is of the human mind, not the human body. Incest, parricide, these things arouse a horror, a revulsion so deep that it seems to be physical, but it is of the mind, not the blood. If it had been of the blood, then Oedipus could never have slain Laius and wedded Jocasta . . . These thoughts brushed across his mind. He recognized them mostly by touch, for his eyes were all for the poor failure before him.

The creature came closer. Gordon backed away. On that white face were emotions which he couldn't read. And he was repelled. It was pity he felt mostly; but pity so deep, so helpless and hopeless, that it was sickening. This thing, this freak, this loathsome parody of a man, which should never have come into existence, offended him. It was like an affront. And what did that trembling working of its features mean?

He backed away and the other moved closer. It was now hardly more than a yard from him. Gordon found himself stopped, backed against a large rock. Again, his fortunate fingers touched something lying on a flat surface of the rock: a long thick shard of glass. A broken fragment of a glass jar—and he knew whose jar it had been. His fingers closed upon it. The poor white thing facing him reached out a trembling arm and touched him on the shoulder. Gordon's hand struck out, brutally stabbing the jagged glass deep into the white chest.

The other was at first surprised. Then it made a sound, a cry of anguish—anguish mingled with a rage and despair which turned Gordon faint and weak. Blood curled from the wound and streamed through the water like a scarf. Still the creature cried, features working convulsively. It slumped backwards, kicked, struggled, swam off into the distance. Gordon, tremblingly supporting

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himself against the rock, watched as it, twitching spasmodically, grew smaller with the distance. Very likely, that wound was mortal. He saw his unlucky foe, at the outer range of vision, cease its struggles and for a short while float listlessly. And he saw the body, now very still, sink downward out of sight, very likely over the edge of that steep cliff, or shelf, into the dark depths below.

And he was no longer alone, for he heard again the harmonious music of the hive, breathing freely with a solemn lilt, a sad strain in it growing ever fainter. The undesirable element had been rejected from the body politic. The weakness ebbed from his limbs and he was tranquil again, even happy.

His spectral guide reappeared and beckoned. Together, the skeleton slightly in the lead, they swam towards the heart of the hive, which throbbed with sound. You will live here forever in happiness. Forever? Yes. Never to cease, for the community is safe. Gordon amplified that for himself, for he had heard that fish never die of old age. It was, he recalled, the fascinating subject of his father's last researches, before he had hit upon the certain means of insuring that he too would never die of old age. He would go his father one better, for this wonderful fringe benefit—now that he was no longer subject to bone-jarring locomotion over dry land and was accessible to the hormonal wizardry of the hive—was to be extended to him. He was never to die, but to live here forever in this underwater Beulah, this submarine Eden.

The skeleton came to a rest and faced him, significantly. There was more. He was to receive something: that much he inferred. A reward? A privilege? An obligation? Perhaps all three were one. They were again at the spot where he had first awakened. Here was the throne on which the patriarchal skeleton had sat so magisterially. And there was the giant clam. It was to the clam that he was conducted. Again, he felt a stirring in his pulse, unaccountable, but like a promise. It was late afternoon. Shadows streamed through the water and touched the face of the shell. The music of the hive rose in a muted crescendo. And there was another manifestation: a fluorescent glow, a pale shimmer or halo, arose and played about the shell, a phosphorescence coming from millions of floating miniscule plants or plant-animals. They bathed it in their soft effulgent light. And the shell opened. Slowly, like a door, as the music thrilled. And he could see that there was something inside, something bedded in the soft flesh. Wider moved the ponderous door, still wider, and he could see the entire form. It was that of a girl. A mammal, beautifully formed.

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And as he hovered there, she opened her eyes, which were grey, and lay looking at nothing. He contemplated that silent gaze. It seemed to him to have the blank comprehensiveness of the sea and the sky and the weather . . . and yet, he saw in it something oddly familiar. For he was reminded of those warm lazy summer days, when the stillness and the gently vibrating haze give to our impressions a kind of finality, as if nothing again were ever going to happen, or should.

Summer days? Perhaps it was from his memories of those days, memories unshared by the multiformed life around him and the pale effigy at his side, that the inspiration and the resource came. *Here? Under the thumb of this giant, forever?* He turned and took a step towards the skeleton. He grasped its chest with both hands and, heaving, broke the rib-cage, savagely shattering it and tearing the white connecting fibres. And with one other reflex movement, he wrenched the skull from the backbone and sent it tumbling through the water to the sand. He broke the pelvis with a kick, and the thin white legs, left standing separately, toppled in opposite directions. And those creatures which had animated and vivified the structure dispersed and scattered in confusion—squidbit, eelportion, musselpart, codpiece, crabmember. All this was the work of one moment. In the next he felt fear, a spasm of fear such as he had never known before. But it didn't destroy him, for attached to the fear, like a rider, was exultation—*his* exultation, for

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he knew that the fear was the fear of the thing fastened to his back and which was flooding his body with its artful hormones.

He turned, his muscular legs and feet twisting about in the swirling sand and, reaching back, grasped the brown flap with strong prying fingers. As he did so, he saw the pale grey light die in the eyes of the newborn girl, saw the soft effulgent glow which bathed her and her soft couch die away, saw the heavy door close slowly down and shut as the music died, brokenly. And he wrenched, tore the thing from his bloody back. It flapped frantically away. In the next instant he was struggling with his own panic and despair, for there was not only the pain of his lacerated back, but that inserted blockage in his throat. He gasped, gaped, strangled. Something tore in his throat and suddenly he was choking on water. He expelled the water, held his breath, and climbed hand over hand to the ceiling. But even as he broke the surface and greeted the glorious light and air of the outer world, he knew that he was lost. He could never make it. He was too far from the shore.

But he struggled, struggled for a long time . . . struggled for air, found something over his mouth, something like a leathery flap, and pawed at it with a nightmarish heaviness and a horrible comprehension. The flap, whatever it was, came loose. He lay for a moment, profoundly exhausted. Sweet, clean pure air flowed into his mouth and over his face. He heard voices and felt hands and opened his eyes. He was lying on wet sand and was peering closely—it took him a long moment to make it out—at the mouth-piece and hose of a pulmotor.

"He's conscious. Wait a minute! Wait a minute, there, fellow—you can't get up without help."

But he struggled, anyway, against their ministering hands. "I'll stand on my own feet," he said. And succeeded in doing so.

He heard a gasp, "He's naked!" and saw a pretty girl in white shorts and a striped blouse turn away, giggling.

The man who had spoken, a life-guard possibly, and who was still saying, "Whoa, there, fellow! You're going to the hospital!" threw a beach-robe over him. He almost shook it off. Once he had deplored all separateness from his fellow man, but now he didn't want help or guidance from anyone. Not ever again. His individual resources would be enough for him, who had broken the bonds of the hive and escaped by his own strength.

But at the moment he was very weak. He looked around, unsteadily: at the ocean, the rugged cliff (his car was still up there, he supposed) and at the white houses in the distance—each thing separate-

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ly and uniquely itself in the clear sunlight. A world worth living in.

"I'm sorry," said another man, sunburnt and dry, who was lending him support from the other side, "we weren't able to save your friend."

"My friend?"

"Yes. Must have been a powerful swimmer. He got you to shore—or, anyway, out to those rocks out there—but couldn't save himself. You were pretty far away, but I could see that you were both hurt. Dashed against the rocks, I guess. Good thing we were looking for you—we found some clothes here. This is no place to go swimming, you know. I saw your friend, large fellow, disappear. He just sank from sight. You see over there, in the boats—they're searching for his body now."

So, mused Gordon, he hadn't done it all by himself, after all? There was something in that to think about.

The two men, holding him above the elbow on each side, conducted him through the crowd of solicitous onlookers—his community of peers: Gordon gratefully, proudly, bestowed that title on them—and from the beach towards a waiting ambulance. The man whose robe he was wearing said, in a tone in which was mingled not only an attempt at consolation but admiration and even envy, "He must have been quite a friend."

Gordon looked out across the bleak ocean. "No," and his reply would have astonished his questioner, if he had heard it, "He was no friend of mine. He was my brother." But he didn't hear it, for Gordon's voice was as faint as the breeze which sighed off the water.

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BOOKS

THE TOPIC FOR TODAY'S SERMON is Sex.

(And the next line, of course, is supposed to be ". . . and now that I have your attention . . ." Actually, I'll be getting back to sex. Meantime—)

Two of the most-discussed and best-selling books of the fall publishing season provide, in their contrasts as well as their common points, some basis at last for understanding what the "science fiction" category label, as currently used in book publishing, actually signifies. Although neither volume uses the label anywhere on its jacket, each of them is an excellent example of a familiar type of s-f: two very different varieties, lying at opposite ends of (but clearly within) the traditional spectrum of "science fiction."

The fact that one of these is a comic-strip book, and the other a 700-page novel of extraordinary literacy, does not in either case detract from the solid s-f virtues of either one. Nor should the habitual reader of the genre be put off by the pretentious *apologias* enclosing both books (in the jacket-flap copy of one, and in the introductions and postscripts to the other). Oddly enough, though quite in keeping with the inversion layers of the publishing climate these days, the comic book comes from Grove Press, and the serious (and possibly important, as well as 'Important') novel from Doubleday.

BARBARELLA is essentially space opera of the good-old *Planet* or *Startling* variety, comparable in plotting, pace, color, and (most of its) content, to the happiest memories of Ed Hamilton and Leigh Brackett, the early Ray Bradbury and the emergent Jack Vance.

GILES GOAT-BOY is a philosophic-picaresque novel of the general type of Pangborn's DAVY or Sheckley's JOURNEY BEYOND TOMORROW [in F&SF as THE JOURNEY OF JOENES]: the education-and-adventures of a uniquely innocent and potent young hero, through whose eyes and actions, in an analogous other-universe, our own society is explored.

Virtually the only points the two books have in common are precisely those factors which set them apart from category s-f publishing, and three out of four of these factors are size:

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They are both big books, one in length, the other in format. (And sold—by s-f standards—at big prices. With GILES, this works out to an almost unique penny-a-page bargain in good reading. BARBARELLA, with 60 actual pages of four to eight panels per page, works out to a hefty 10¢ a sheet.)

They are both big sellers: GILES is doing so well that Doubleday is reissuing a revised hardcover edition of Barth's last novel, THE SOTWEED FACTOR. BARBARELLA, according to the jacket, sold 20,000 copies of its original French edition at art-book prices—and this does not include, presumably, the figures for its underground sale since being reportedly banned in Paris.

They are both Big critically—like, I mean, *in*. John Barth, of course, has been a favorite of the Literary Establishment for some time, and now bids fair to inherit the #1 spot on the college campuses from Tolkien. As for BARBARELLA, I quote from the jacket copy, which quotes from the French literary weekly, *Arts* (a serious and respected journal, *honestly*): "*Barbarella* recaptures the spirit of the American comic strips of the early days when even the impossible was possible. It has the same audacity and originality, the same mixture of fantasy and humor, beauty and horror, cruelty and eroticism. In its physical appearance and inspiration, in its heroine and its themes, *Barbarella* reflects not only filmic and literary techniques, but also certain conflicting ideals of our times.

"*Barbarella* . . . is the archetype of the modern female. . . . She is the modern vamp, the woman who offers herself from billboards, ads, and movies . . . the liberated woman, who constantly controls her own destiny rather than submitting to the dictates of men . . . a creature of the future who, confronted with the monsters and robots of an unknown planet, is put to the test like a medieval knight or the heroes of old. . . . Barbarella is not only desirable, capricious, and fascinating; she is also in quest of the absolute."

Other quotes include: "the first comic strip for grown-ups," "a truly mythic character," "a modern epic," and "the incarnation of the eroticism of today."

With which we come to the fourth, and most significant, factor separating both the pleasant absurdity of the one book and the possible sublimity of the other from what is published and sold as "science fiction": I *said* I'd get back to Sex.

And indeed I will—after a brief pause for novel identification. That is, although GILES GOAT-BOY is much concerned with sex, sexuality, and sexual behavior, and although these elements are responsible for much of what is

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George is my name; my deeds have been heard of in Tower Hall, and my childhood has been chronicled in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology.* I am he that was called in those days Billy Bocksfuss—cruel misnomer. For had I indeed a cloven foot I'd not now hobble upon a stick or need ride pick-a-back to class in humid weather. . . .

I was, in other words, the Ag-Hill Goat-Boy. Who misbegot me, and on whom, who knew, or in what corner of the University I drew first breath? It was my fate to call no man Daddy, no woman Mom. Herr Doktor Professor Spielman was my keeper: Maximilian Spielman, the great Mathematical Psycho-Proctologist and former Minority Leader in the College Senate; the same splendid Max who gave his name to the Law of Cyclology, and . . . was drummed off the quad a year before retirement on a trumped-up charge of intellectual turpitude . . . thus it came about that he spent his last years as Senior Goatherd on the New Tammany College Farms. . . . His masterwork, *The Riddle of the Sphincters,* twenty years in the writing and done but for the index, he fed to the goats a chapter at a time: I myself, so he told me years later over Mont d'Or cheese and bock beer, had lunched on the Second Appendix, a poem-in-numbers meant to demonstrate mathematically his belief in the fundamental rectitude of student nature. . . .

He never could have prophesied his present fame. . . . nor would it much have assuaged his misanthropy to foresee it. . . . It's true he kept a seraglio of nannies (though his appetities in this line have been much exaggerated, as

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good in the book, it is by no means a "sex novel," nor even a novel primarily about Sex. So before I get into my Sex Sermon, it seems best to pause and fill in something of the context and character of this wonderfully complex and even more wonderfully enjoyable novel.

My first, and probably only adverse, comment is a recommendation to skip the introductory matter, where the author, in various personae, explains why a book of this sort is really Okay, if not indeed Great—and incidentally, why he doesn't give a damn whether you like it or not (which I very much doubt is correct—and I for one am weary of the reverse-sell). Beyond these thirty-odd roman-numeraled pages is a second title page, which reads:

R. N. S.

The
Revised New Syllabus
of
George Giles
Our Grand Tutor

Being the Autobiographical and Hortatory Tapes Read Out at New Tammany College to His Son

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has his prowess) and named them after leading members of the Faculty Women's Club—but there was no malice in the voice that summoned Helen to his stall, or Maude, or Shirley; and the respect he showed Mary V. Appenzeller, my own dear dam, any boy might wish for his lady mother. . . .

I know now that I am not Max and Mary's kid: that much he told me on the day I learned I was a man. . . . Sweet Mary Appenzeller neglected the rest of her family to nurse me; thanks be to her splendid udder, whose twin founts flowed at my least beck, I grew from strapping infancy into a boyhood such as human males may dream of. . . . Like my stallmates I feared fire, loud noise, and the bigger bucks, but only in the presence of those terrors, never between times, and so anxiety was foreign to me as soap. When I was gay I gamboled where I would, banged heads with my brothers and bleated in the clover; angry I kicked my stall, my pals, or Mary Appenzeller, whichever was behind me, and was either ignored or rekicked at once. I learned neither sums nor speech until I was ten, but . . . I could . . . distinguish six hundred ninety sorts of plants and eat all but eighty three of them. My moral training required no preachment: . . . Who neglects his appetites suffers their pangs; Who presumes incautiously may well be butted; Who fouls his stall must sleep in filth. Cleave to him, I learned, who does you kindness; Avoid him who does you hurt. . . .

From GILES GOAT-BOY, by John Barth; Doubleday, 1966; $6.95; 710 pp. plus 23 pp. of introductions.

Giles (,) Stoker

By the West Campus Automatic Computer
And by Him Prepared for the Furtherment of the Gilesian Curriculum

The excerpts above are from the first chapter; after which, George meets a wonderful human called Lady Creamhair, who arouses him, with peanut butter and fairy tales, to a recognition of his own membership in the race. George is then prepared by Max for his eventual entrance into New Tammany College. His education during this period convinces him that he has a very special destiny: that indeed he is the predicted new Grand Tutor, who will have the power to enter the Belly of WESCAC, the giant computer, and change its AIM, so as to end forever the terrible threat of a totally annihilative Campus Riot III with either Nikolay or T'ang College, or both of them.

Armed with his goatherding stick, protected by an amulet made of the testicles of Freddie, the greatest buck of the herd, and accompanied by Max and by G. Her-

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[Panel One: Womb-shaped spacecraft in foreground over Xanadu-like city set in giant crater of arid planetscape, under strange skies.] Barbarella recognized Lythion by its three satellites. The galactic charts showed it as being a relatively hospitable planet. Beneath the astroship a continent unfolds which at first appears to the traveller to be nothing but a volcanic desert . . . but suddenly, nestled in a giant crater Crystallia, the great greenhouse, appears . . . .

[Panel Two: Ship in orbit around twin-mooned planet.] What misadventures, what disappointments in love, have led this girl to wander alone through a solar system far removed from ours . . . .?

[Panel Three: Brigitte Bardot-type face and hair, close up against suggestion of control cabin seat.] For days on end her rocket had raced past airless, lifeless worlds . . . At last, with the help of her own fatigue, the features of the man responsible for her suffering grow blurred . . . She is capable of confronting new faces . . .

[Panel Four: View into cockpit of spaceship, Barbarella in skintight jumpsuit and long black gloves, tousled hair, semi-prone on landing-contour-couch.] A strong wind makes it difficult to land, and the rocket controls respond badly . . . Exhausted, Barbarella feels her nerves betraying her . . .

From BARBARELLA, by Jean-Claude Forest, translated by Richard Seaver; Grove Press, 1966; $5.95; 68 folio pages.

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rold (a lowly library assistant who lost most of his mind under WESCAC's deadly EAT rays while rescuing the infant-George from the Belly), the Hero-to-be sets out for West Campus. On the way, he encounters the beautiful Anastasia (who, quite by accident, lures G. Herrold to his death); Croaker, the half-savage giant from one of the newly emergent Frumentian colleges; Maurice Stoker and his blackleather-motorcycle retinue of Powerhouse guards; and Peter Greene, the paper and plastics tycoon responsible for the roadside signs, *Keep Our Forests Greene.*

George soon learns that others besides Max are cynical about the realities of the Finals, Graduation, and Commencement Gate, but perseveres in his own faith and gains acceptance as a Special Student by forcing an entrance to the registration area (the first in all studentdom to do so since mythic times) through the fabled Scrapegoat Grate (overcoming the ritual opposition of Stoker in the traditional role of Dean O'Flunks). George then wins an Assignment from WESCAC, completion of which will qualify him for his Finals and, presumably, enable him to

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oust the false Grand Tutor, Harold Bray.

The Assignment is a list of seven tasks "to be done at once in no time": George must *Fix the Clock, End the Boundary Dispute, See Through My Ladyship,* and perform other largely ambiguous labors, which bring him into close association with Dr. Eblis Eierkopf, of the lenses, mirrors, and measurements and Classmate X of the Student-Unionist Nikolya College, and . . .

And so it goes. Education, theology (the Enos Enochites, the Moishians, etc.), science, politics (the Quiet Riot and Creeping Student-Unionism), psychiatry, social protest and social conformity (the *Beists* and the Mid-percentile class), all come in for a share of the action. Barth does not have much to say that is new or startling on these topics, but he says so much *to the point* about so many things, and does it with stunning style and uproarious comedy. Whatever else may be happening, whenever *any*thing is happening (aside from purely philosophic discussion), Sex also rears its variously lovely, ugly, wistful, joyous, painful, funny head.

GILES might have been a good book without the sex (I say doubtfully, because I can't imagine it that way), but it would not have been the *very* good book it is—and certainly not the first-rate science fiction it also is: because with all of Barth's acute observation and piercing comment on other aspects of human behavior, the only really speculative, experimental thinking in the book concerns the varieties of sexual and quasi-sexual relationships and activities worked out between the characters.

BARBARELLA, for that matter, would be a rather routine planet-story strip—a slightly fresher, more plausibly motivated, less careful though more colorful *Flash Gordon*—if it did not, as advertised, "incarnate the eroticism of today." To the extent that this description is accurate, the strip gains credibility: the girl-on-her-own either seeking sexual companionship or simply using sex as a ticket (or a bit of both) is a valid modern phenomenon, rather more believable as the central figure of an adventure series than the under-sexed high-minded Boy Scout of the space patrol, or Tom Swift of the trading ship or intergalactic governmental service. But "eroticism of today" while partially accurate, is quite inadequate as a description of Barbarella's adventures, which include a variety of experiences not yet available for testing in the flesh, and it is these incidents that supply the only real novelty of the strip.

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Now as it happens, I like Sex as a topic, and I am heartily in favor of more and gustier public discussion. I enjoy reading and writing about it, and I like good pornography at least as much as any other good fiction. Those who feel otherwise will not care for BARBARELLA, and I suppose there are still some among us for whom GILES will be spoiled by its sexual content. But whatever the individual reader's preferences in subject matter, or prejudices in morality, I think there will be few who do not recognize—whether with delight, indifference, or horror—that however things *should* be, our society actually is in the midst of a tremendous upheaval in interpersonal behavior in general, and sexual mores in particular. The surface manifestations we are witnessing right now are only the first disturbances of a major groundswell. The combined, and in some ways conflicting, tensions produced by nuclear anxiety, the population explosion, and the leisure by-product of automation, along with the proliferation of psychochemical drugs of all sorts and the new technology of contraception, all coming hard on the heels of what a short time ago we still thought of as the Freudian "revolution"—all these, inevitably, are going to result in radical (and I mean "from the roots") changes in sexual attitudes and activities everywhere. (Changes which will be accelerated, I should expect, by the intercultural exchanges that have already begun, and will increase with the imminence of global television: if the Eskimoes or the Samoans do it . . . ?).

No doubt there will be backswings as drastic as the experimental movements. We can anticipate, over the next generation or two, virtually every range of puritanism and licentiousness, of individualism and togetherness, of homo- and hetero- and auto- and ??-sexuality, in fits and fads and wild pendulum swings. We can—and some of us no doubt will—simply refuse to think about it. There are still some people who prefer not to think about the reality of chemical warfare, or of space travel, or DNA, or thought control, or anti-biotics. But for better or worse, these things are now part of our conscious knowledge, and thus increasingly affect our personal lives. The same is true, without question, of the Pill and the Loop and the "psychic energizers" and tranquillizers and pep pills with which, more and more, we pre-determine our emotional states.

It is time, and long past time, for some of the same kind of hard-headed speculative thinking that science fiction contributed to space flight and atomics, to be done in interpersonal psychology and sexology. The startling thing is not that it should appear now in

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a book like GILES, but that there has been so little of it *inside* science-fiction up till now.

Of course, a few things have been done. But by and large, what sex there has been in s-f has been conventional and "decorative" rather than speculative or exploratory. Except for some cautious handling of miscegination themes, multiple marriage, and homosexuality (all greeted as radical and exciting within the field), almost all discussion has been impersonal or lavishly symbolic.

There are reasons, of course, and not *all* of them have been publishers' timidities, but few of them are applicable now. In particular, the new willingness of book publishers to handle longer novels in category publishing should make it more possible for s-f authors to deal adequately with intense personal topics. BARBARELLA is a good direction sign, and GILES GOAT-BOY a fair start. But based on past performances under conditions of extreme limitation, I cannot help wondering what—for instance—Sturgeon, Aldiss, Heinlein, Leiber, Farmer, Zelazny, Ballard, Disch, Moorcock, Delany might do, if any of them really *tried?*

—JUDITH MERRIL

BOOKS RECEIVED

FICTION

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR, Enrique Anderson Imbert; Southern Illinois University Press 1966; 226 pp.; $5.95 (31 stories; translation and introduction by Isabel Reade)

COLOSSUS, D. F. Jones; Putnam 1967; 256 pp.; $4.95

THE ADVENTURES OF GREMLIN, DuPre Jones, drawings by Edward Gorey; Lippincott 1966; 112 pp.; $3.95

THE SCORPIONS, Robert Kelly; Doubleday 1967; 188 pp.; $3.95

THREE NOVELS (RULE GOLDEN, THE DYING MAN, NATURAL STATE), Damon Knight; Doubleday 1967; 189 pp.; $3.95

WHY CALL THEM BACK FROM HEAVEN?, Clifford D. Simak, Doubleday 1967; 190 pp.; $3.95

GENERAL

THE UNIVERSE: From Flat Earth to Quasar, Isaac Asimov; Walker and Co. 1966; 308 pp.; $6.50 (illus., index)

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"It's the one attack the country wasn't prepared for, Mr. President!"

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"Don't expect to make a killing in the market," a stockbroker once warned us, "and always keep adequate defensive reserves." That was a while back, and since our reserves are still engaged in the Battle of the Budget, we're beginning to wonder if we'll ever get into the Big Fight, much less make a killing. And maybe a good thing suggests the story below; which (with a typically inventive Friedman twist) charts the progress of, not the market, but an investor—with some spectacularly odd results. Bruce Jay Friedman is the author of two very fine and very funny novels: STERN *and* A MOTHER'S KISSES.

THE INVESTOR

by Bruce Jay Friedman

SINCE THERE WERE NO OPEN beds at the hospital when he arrived, the man had been put temporarily in a room used for storing defective bottle caps. Seven days after his admission, he lay there among the caps, his eyes bulging sightlessly at the ceiling. A bowl of Spanish shawl fish stood on the table beside him with a note against it that said, "Your favorites, from Mumsy." Four doctors conferred in low voices around him and when the specialist from Rochester arrived, they broke their circle to help him off with his coat. The specialist was a neat man with little feet, given to clasping his hands behind his back, rocking on his heels, making smacking sounds with his lips and staring off over people's shoulders. No sooner did he have his coat off than he was rocking and smacking away, his glance shooting out of the room into the midday sun.

"I'll tell you frankly," the resident doctor said to him, "I didn't want to go out of the house." He was a nervous middle-aged man, not technically bald but with patches of hair scattered carelessly about his head. "We've done a pile of work on him and I say if you don't have a specialist in the house, you're not a hospital. But it

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is a baffler and everyone kept saying bring in Rochester and I do agree you get freshness when you go outside. Keep going outside though and you're not a hospital. In any case, the house has done it all, Doctor. Blood, intestines, heart, neurological. We don't get a sign of anything. Come over and have a look at the bugger. He hasn't moved a muscle in a week."

"Not just yet," said the specialist, rocking and smacking, his eyes high, glancing off tops of heads now so that the resident doctor found himself looking into the specialist's neck.

"I've heard that you don't look at patients immediately in Rochester," said the resident doctor. "We dart right over to them here. Oh well, I guess that's why one goes out of the house."

"Nourishment?" asked the specialist between smacks.

"Yes, I know you're big on that in Rochester," said the resident. "A few nibbles of an American-cheese sandwich now and then. That's all he's taken. We thought we'd go intravenous tomorrow."

"Pulse?"

"Fairly normal," said the resident. "I like your reasoning. I have to confess there was a time I wanted very much to practice in Rochester. Still, I feel this is a sound house we have here."

"Temperature?" asked the specialist, looking overhead now as though annoyed by a helicopter.

"Irregular. It's one hundred one and seven-eighths just now. The house is using the new electronic thermometers. They're awfully good, get you all the way from twenty-five to a hundred and fifty degrees, and they work in eighths. We're fussy about temperature, and record every fluctuation. It's a program the house is developing —Snub Pulse, Study Fever. It's our pet around here, and we thought we might even interest Rochester in converting."

"What was it yesterday?"

"Let me see—" said the resident, studying a chart. "It was one hundred three and five-eighths, down around two points today."

"And the day before?"

"One hundred even," said the resident.

"Tell me," said the specialist, lowering his eyes slightly for the first time since his arrival, "was it by any chance in the nineties the day previous?"

"Ninety-nine and three-eighths," said the resident.

The specialist stopped rocking and his eyes met the resident's full this time. "It held steady at that figure three days before that, didn't it?"

"Why, yes," said the resident. "Right on the button four straight days. You're good. Funny, you think you've got something down pat, temperatures, for example, and far away in another house, there's someone running circles

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around you. Excellent show, Doctor. You've got to go out of the house now and then, you really do."

"Plimpton Rocket Fuels," said the specialist, his eyes wide now, his mouth open.

"Fuels?" said the resident. "Are they a hive? I didn't see any sense to skin work, since the whole thing's so up in the air. I just skipped right over it. Our house dermatologist checked him though and found his skin clear."

"Electronics," said the specialist.

"I'm surprised you buy that theory up in Rochester," said the resident. "Why, the radiation level is so low here in Queens, it would take . . ."

"You don't understand," said the specialist. "Electronics. Electronics stock. I'm in it. For seven days your patient's fever chart has followed the exact pattern of Plimpton Rocket Fuels, which closed at one hundred one and seven-eighths today. I know because I called my broker and asked him whether he thought I should stay in."

"I don't know what to do about a thing like that," said the resident. "You think it's mental, eh? I tell you if it's psycho, we shoo them right on. We're a good house, but we're a small house and we're not equipped to do head work."

"It's a glamour issue, too," said the specialist, peering at the sun. "That means wide swings. Christ, if only he'd been on a good, solid blue chip. All right, I'll have a look at him."

The patient was a neutral-looking man who might have played hotel clerk parts in movies. The specialist took his wrist and rocked back and forth with it a few times as though trying to lead him from the bed into a tango.

"Of course, you see more of these in Rochester than we do," said the resident, "but it seems to me all he has to do is liquidate his holdings. Such a man has no business in the market."

The specialist passed his hand over the man's eyes and the resident said, "I don't know, sometimes I feel by your silence you're rapping the house. I'll stack it up against any house its size on the Eastern seaboard."

The specialist kneeled now and whispered to the patient. "Are you in Plimpton?"

The patient was silent.

"How many shares of Plimpton do you own?" the specialist whispered.

The patient continued to stare goldfish-like at the ceiling, but then his hands fluttered.

"Pencil and paper," said the specialist.

"We've got everything," said the resident, diving into the bedside table. The patient's hands took the equipment and in a weak scrawl wrote:

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Stock Market not for our kind. Drummed into me from childhood. Work too hard for our money. Had a thousand, wanted to put it into Idaho Chips. Remembered Mom's words. Not for our kind. Would have been rich. Once lost a hundred on cotton futures. But no stocks. Thanks for your interest, Jerry.

"But why Plimpton?" the specialist said to the window, crumpling the note. "Of all issues to get on. Gorch Gas, and we'd have a chance. All right, it won't affect anything, but try to get some liquids into him. There won't be any till the board opens tomorrow, but keep me informed as to any changes in temperature."

"We check temps every twelve minutes around the clock," said the doctor. "You'll have to twist our arms to get a pulse reading from us, but we're champs at temps."

The specialist visited the patient at four in the afternoon the following day. "I know, I know," he said to the resident, "she jumped two and three-eighths today. That stock will give you fits. If you think that's a swing, watch it for a while. You've got to be out of your mind to stay with Plimpton. Still, it's exciting, a crap game every day. Tell me, did he go with it?"

"Right to the fraction. You remember, the stock opened a little soft and he was up taking applesauce. But that wave of late-afternoon buying finished him right off. I've got him in ice packs now. I was up all night with our temps and the Dow Jones index. I thought there might be some more of this. The house is terribly sensitive about epidemics. I came up with an ulcer patient in the ward who was on Atlas Paper Products for three days, but I checked the market today. Atlas went off four even and our ulcer man closed at one hundred three and a half. So I guess the Plimpton fellow is all we've got. You must see much more of this in Rochester than we do."

"I don't want to talk about Rochester," said the specialist. "We've got a sick man and if I know Plimpton, there isn't going to be much time. If I was on one, I wouldn't want it to be Plimpton. Get his wife down here. Maybe she can tell us how this started."

The patient's wife had a vapid but pretty face and a voluptuous figure. "I guess you know your husband's hooked up to the market," said the specialist, his eyes wandering off down the hallway. "So we thought we'd get you down here. Do you know of anything he had to do with the stock market that might have gotten his fever tied on to Plimpton Rocket Fuels?"

"Jerry doesn't like anything white collar," said the woman, flouncing and rearranging her figure on the chair. "I'll give you our whole marriage. He married

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me 'cause I had red hair, green eyes and big boobs. He got me on the phone once by accident and we got to talking and he asked me what I looked like and I told him red hair, green eyes and big boobs. So he come right over and we got married. I don't know if he goes to the stock market. He goes to the burly a lot. He'll go to any burly, even in Pennsylvania. He says he likes the comedians but I suspect he's looking at boobs."

"You don't feel he's ever diddled around on the big board then?" said the specialist, making soft, speculative smacking sounds with his lips.

"Are you making those at my things?" said the woman, gathering her Persian lamb stole about her shoulders.

"I'm a doctor," shot back the specialist.

"Well, I don't know," said the woman. "Jerry delivers yogurt. He's not in the union so he has to do his deliveries on the sly. He doesn't like anything white collar. Is any of that what you mean?"

"You haven't helped us," said the specialist. "We've got a sick man."

When the woman had flounced off into the elevator, the resident said, "A house is only human. What can any house do against opposition like that?"

"She can go to beans," said the specialist. "What's Plimpton doing now, one hundred four and a half? That means it's all up to the President. He's coming over at eleven tonight. You'd do just as well to drop your temps and tune in on him."

In his address, the President called for an end to spiteful silences in our relations with the Russians and Plimpton took it on the chin to the tune of a five-and-a-quarter-point plunge.

"I know, I know," said the specialist, getting out of his coat and making for the patient's bed. "His fever's broken and he feels better. Look, I've had this baby since it came on the boards at two dollars a share and if you think Plimpton is going to sit at ninety-nine you're all wet. Did he close with it?"

"Of course," said the resident. "But something's going on in him. We've never seen anything like it in the house. Get your ear down on his epiglottis."

The specialist did so and said, "It's a clicking sound."

"Not unlike that of a stock market ticker tape, wouldn't you say?"

The specialist got down again and said, "It goes tick-a-tack-tick-tick, tick-a-tack-tick-tick. Is that the way you get it?"

"More or less," said the resident. "It's certainly good for a house to get a wide variety of things. I may even suggest that we stop shooing off psychos. What the hell."

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The patient's hand fluttered and the resident dove forward with a pad.

He wrote, in bolder, somewhat less feverish strokes this time:

No connection. Joke. Also do police sirens, foghorns, and Chester Morris. Do you like to kid around, too? Jerry.

"I'd get plenty sore," said the specialist, "but I'm gentle to patients, cruel only to relatives and visitors."

Plimpton picked up only an eighth of a point the following day, but the specialist was grave and irritable. "The worst," he said. "I know she's holding firm in the nineties, but I heard something nasty from a gynecologist friend of mine. He claims Plimpton may buy Tompkin Rocket Fuels. You get a Plimpton-Tompkin merger and our friend will go up like a torch. All right, there's something bothering me and I'm doing my bit now." The specialist picked up the phone and said, "Hello, Connie, look I want to unload Plimpton. No, I'm not crazy. I've got a patient whose temperature is on it and I've got to try to get it down. Maybe I'll come back in when this thing is resolved. All right, Conrad."

"I never thought I'd see the day when I'd let Plimpton soar and not soar with it," said the specialist, his eyes wandering off into a broom closet. "But you're either in the medical profession or you're not."

"I just want to say that I've never seen anything quite like that in medicine," said the resident. "And I want to shake your hand and tell you that it comes not just from me but from the whole house."

"There'll be none of that," said the specialist. "Let me see now. Put a call through to the company. I say do anything if you've got a patient who's liable to go up like a torch!"

"This is a new sound in doctoring," said the resident, putting through a call to Wyoming. The specialist grabbed it away from him, smacked his lips a few times and said, "I don't want any board of directors. Get me the company physician. That you? Look, I want to stop that Tompkin merger if I can. I've got a patient, nice lad, whose fever is hooked up to Plimpton and this merger is going to kick him way upstairs and out of business. Yes, it's my first. Heard of a clergyman whose pulse was tied up to the '51 Cardinal fielding averages, but I think that worked differently. I'm vague on it. You won't do a thing? I didn't think so, but I thought I'd give it a try."

The specialist hung up and said, "He says if he as much as opens his mouth, it's socialized

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medicine. I'm not sure if he's right but I haven't got time to go figuring it out. I'd better take a look at our man."

The specialist took the patient's pulse and said, "I hope he and his wife don't have any little dividends. All right, I know. That's not funny. I always did tell baddies."

A note in the patient's handwriting was affixed to his pajama lapel. It said:

What kind of a soak are you putting on me for this treatment? I forgot to ask about the soak. If it's steep, somebody's going to get it right in the old craw. I don't see any point to being high class when you're doing biz. Yours, Jerry.

"In our confusion, we forgot to submit a partial bill," said the resident.

"I don't want to talk dollars," said the specialist. "Practice medicine. Did you see me sell my Plimpton?"

"I've seen things I've never seen before in this house."

"I just don't want him going off like a torch," said the specialist.

Plimpton vaulted four points early the next day on the strength of the Tompkin merger speculation, but the rumor was quashed early in the afternoon and the stock settled back with a two-point gain. The patient's wife appeared in the room and said to the specialist, "I'm sorry I was fresh about what you did yesterday. I figure you're in there with unhealth all day and you can't help what kind of sounds you make with your mouth when you see a healthy set of things. I'll have a beer with you if you like."

"I'm trying to be a doctor," said the specialist.

"Maybe it was my fault," said the woman. "Plenty of wives go to the burly *with* their old men. Maybe he really did go there for the comedians. I want the old buzzard to get better."

"He's in a good house," said the resident.

Trading was brisk the following day, and the net result was fine for the market but unfortunate, of course, for the patient. Rails, utilities, industrials, all had nice gains by early afternoon. Specifically, Plimpton got right out in front by noon, racing up to 105¾, and then the worst happened. At five in the afternoon the specialist appeared in the hospital and did not remove his coat. "I don't feel up to examining him right now," he said to the resident.

"I want to say something on behalf of the whole house," said the resident.

"I know, I know," he said to the resident. "You're very kind. But perhaps if I'd sold just a day earlier. Or spread a rumor about

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bad management in the company. You don't think as clearly as you should when you're in the middle of one of these."

"This house has been privileged to see at work one of the finest . . ."

"You're very kind," said the specialist. "All right, I suppose we ought to call his kin, the wife, and get her down here."

"Once in a man's life," said the resident, "he's got to break some new ground, to do something out of his deepest heatfelt yearnings. I'm going back to Rochester with you, if I may."

But the specialist's eyes were off somewhere in the isotope ward. In twenty minutes, the wife was there.

"He went at three this afternoon," said the specialist. "We did everything we could, but you can't tamper with the economy. It's too powerful. It was something we couldn't anticipate. The stock got up to one hundred five and three-quarters and then split two for one. He didn't have a chance. When he dropped to the new price, fifty-two and seven-eights, we hot-toweled him and he did rally a point or two, but when the board closed for the day, it was all over. Look, I know I should hold back awhile, but I'm all keyed up and I'm blurting this right out anyway. You're a doll and have you ever been to Rochester?"

"My mother said all doctors were bastardos, and we paid them in crops, the main one being asparagus spears. Are you sure you're not saying all of this because of m'boobs?"

"I'm a sensitive doctor-type," said the specialist, staring off over her pompadour.

"I ought to collect up Jerry, but I'm not collecting anyone who's always hung out at the burly," said the woman, taking the specialist's arm. "I hope you're not a bastardo."

With that, the specialist flew out of the hospital with the woman, pouncing upon her once in the railroad sleeper that whisked them northward and once again the same evening, minutes after they arrived at his bachelor duplex in the Rochester suburbs. He held his pounces to two daily through their one-week honeymoon, but on the eighth day of their marriage, the specialist found himself tearing home in midafternoon to institute a third, between hospital research and afternoon clinic. The couple then went to five, the doctor giving up afternoon clinic completely. It was only then he realized, at first in panic and then with mounting satisfaction, that they were on a new issue, something called Electronic Lunch, which had come on the big board almost unnoticed but seemed to be climbing swiftly thanks to recommendations from two old-line investment services. ◀

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Last month we published Fred Hoyle's BLACKMAIL, *a short and funny satire on T.V. and T.V. ratings. Here, as promised, is another new story by the well known astronomer-writer. This one is a totally absorbing piece of science fiction, and to say more would perhaps spoil an interesting surprise. (Both stories will be included in* ELEMENT 79, *a collection of Fred Hoyle's stories soon to be published by The New American Library.)*

ZOOMEN

by Fred Hoyle

IN THE SECOND HALF OF JULY I was able to get away on a two week vacation. I decided to go off 'Munro-bagging' in the Scottish Highlands. Hotel accommodation being difficult in the Highlands in the summer, especially for a single person, I hired a caravan with a car to match. Driving north the first day, I got precisely to the Scottish border immediately south of Jedburgh. The evening was beautifully fine. I argued I didn't want to spend the whole of the morrow driving, if indeed the morrow was going to be as clear as this. The obvious tactic was to be away at the first light of dawn. By ten o'clock I could be well across the Lowlands. Then I could spend the afternoon 'doing' one of the southern peaks, perhaps in the Ben Lawers range.

It fell out as I had planned. I reached Killin not much after 10 a.m., found a caravan site, bought fresh meat and other provisions in the town, and set off for Glenlyon, with the intention of walking up Meall Ghaordie. The afternoon was as fine and beautiful as it could possibly be. I quitted the car at the nearest point to my mountain and set off across the lower bogland. I moved upward at a deliberately slow pace, in part because this was my first day on the hills, in part because the sun was hot. I remember the myriads of tiny coloured flowers under my feet. It took about two hours to reach the summit. I sat down there and munched a couple of apples. Then I laid myself flat on a grassy knoll, using my rucksack for a pillow. The early start and the warm

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day together had made me distinctly sleepy. It was not more than a minute, I suppose, before I nodded off.

I have fallen asleep quite a number of times on a mountain top. The wakening always produces a slight shock, presumably because one is heavily conditioned to waking indoors. There is always a perceptible moment during which you hunt for your bearings. It was so on this occasion, except the shock was deeper. There was a first moment when I expected to be in a normal bedroom, then a moment in which I remembered that by rights I should be on the summit of a mountain, then a moment when I had become aware of the place where I had in fact awakened and knew it was not at all the right place, not the summit of Meall Ghaordie.

The room I was in was a large rectangular box. I scrambled to my feet and started to inspect the place. Perhaps it may seem absurd to imply that a box-like room needed inspection, particularly when it was quite empty. Yet there were two very queer things about it. The light was artificial, for the box was wholly opaque and closed, except where a passageway opened out of one of the walls. The distribution of the light was strange. For the life of me I simply could not determine where it was coming from. There were no obvious bulbs or tubes. It almost seemed as if the walls themselves were aglow. They were composed of some material which looked to my inexpert eye merely like one of the many new forms of plastic. But in that case how could light be coming out of such a material?

The box was not nearly as large as I had at first thought. The dimensions in fact were roughly thirty by fifty, the height about twenty feet. The lighting produced the impression of a place the size of a cathedral, an effect I have noticed before in underground caves.

The second strange thing was my sense of balance. Not that I found it difficult to stand or anything as crude as that. When climbing a mountain, the legs quickly become sensitive to balance. If I had not just come off a mountain, it is likely the difference would have passed unnoticed. Yet I could feel a difference of some kind, slight but definite.

My explorations naturally led to the passageway, which didn't go straight for very far. Round a bend I came to a forking point. I paused to remember the division. There were more twists and turns, so that soon I had the strong impression of being in a maze. It gave me the usual moment of panic, of feeling I had lost my way. Then I reflected I had no 'way' to lose. Instantly I became calm again and simply strolled where my fancy dictated. The passage eventually brought me back to the large box-like room.

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There in the middle of it was my rucksack, the rucksack against which I had laid my head on the summit of Meall Ghaordie. I tried several times and always I came back to the box-like room. Although the passages had the semblance of a multitude of branches, this also was an illusion. In fact there were eight distinct ways through the system. I managed to get the time required for a single 'transit' of the passageways down to about ninety seconds, so the whole arrangement, if not actually poky, was not very large in size. It was just that it was made to seem large.

I did still another turn through the passageways and was startled on this occasion to hear running feet ahead of me. My heart thumped madly, for although I might have seemed calm outwardly, fear was never very far from my side. Around the corner ahead burst a girl of about eighteen or so clad in a dressing gown. At the sight of me, standing there blocking the passageway, she let out a nerve-shattering scream. She stood for twenty or thirty seconds and then flung herself with extreme violence into my arms. "Where are we?" she sobbed, "where are we?" She went on repeating her question, clutching me with a good, powerful muscular grip. Without in any way exceeding natural propriety, I held her closely; it was a natural enough thing to do in the circumstances. Suddenly I felt an acute nausea sweep through me, akin to the late stages of sea-sickness. The clinch between us dissolved in a flash, for the girl must have felt the same sickness, since she instantly burst out with a violent fit of vomiting.

We both stood there panting. I steadied myself against the wall of the passageway for my knees felt weak.

"And who might you be?"

"Giselda Horne," she answered. The voice was American.

"You'd better take that thing off," I said, indicating the dressing-gown, now the worse for wear from the sickness.

"I suppose so. I was in a room down here when I came to." The girl led the way to a box, precisely square as far as I could tell, opening out of the very passageway. I felt certain I must have passed this spot many times, but there had been no opening before. Giselda Horne staggered into the box, moaning slightly. I made to follow but soon stopped. I was only just inside when another wave of sickness hit me in the pit of the stomach. Some instinct prompted me to step back into the passage. As I did so, a panel slid silently and rapidly back, closing off the box. With the double attack I was hard put to take any action, but I did shout to the girl and bang my fist on the panel. If she made any answer I was unable to hear it.

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I tried to walk off the sickness by touring through the system of passages, but to no avail. I felt just as rotten as before. At quite some length, for I must have gone through the system many times by other routes before I found it, I came on exactly such a square box as Giselda Horne had gone into. With some apprehension I stepped inside it. Two things happened. A similar panel slid closed behind me, and within thirty seconds the sickness had gone.

This box was a cube with sides of about twelve feet. It contained absolutely nothing except a heavy metal door let into one of the walls which opened to a moderate tug. Inside was a volume about the size of a fairish oven, in which I found a platter covered with stuff. Before I could examine it further the nausea started again. This time it seemed as if I too would reach the vomiting stage. Just in time the panel slid open and I staggered into the passage with the irrational thought that I must reach the toilet before my stomach hit the roof. Out in the passage the sickness dropped steeply away. In minutes I felt quite normal again. Then suddenly it started up once more; the panelling opened, as if to invite me back into the box, and once inside the sickness was gone. The process was repeated thrice more, in and out of the box. Long before the end of the lesson I knew exactly what it meant—move in, move out, to orders. From where? I had no idea, but the lesson had done one thing for me. My fears had quite gone. Manifestly I was under some kind of surveillance, a surveillance whose mode of operation I couldn't remotely guess. Yet instead of my fears being increased, the exact opposite happened. From this point on, I was not only outwardly calm but I was inwardly master of myself.

With the passing of the sickness I felt quite hungry. Apart from a light lunch on the slopes of Meall Ghaordie, my last meal had been at 5 a.m. on the Scottish border. I tried the stuff on the platter in the oven. It was neither pleasant nor unpleasant, about like vegetable marrow. How nutritive it was I couldn't tell at all, so I simply ate until I was no longer hungry.

Next I noticed the floor was softer here than it was in the passage or than it was in the big rectangular box. It would be quite tolerable to sleep on. It was harder than the usual bed, but after the first two or three days it would seem comfortable enough. What about a toilet? There was nothing here in the box at all appropriate to a toilet. So how did one fare if taken short with the panel closed? I determined to put the matter to test. I made preparations to use the floor of the box itself. I didn't get very far, nor had I expected to do. The sickness came, the panel slid by, and within a minute I found a new

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box opening out off the passage. Stepping inside I discovered one large and one small compartment. The small compartment was obviously the privy, for it had a hole about a foot in diameter in its floor. I made the best use of it I could, wondering what I should do for toilet paper. My thoughts on this somewhat embarrassing subject were interrupted by a veritable deluge descending on my head from above. I hopped out of the smaller compartment into the larger one. Here the downpour was somewhat less intense, about the intensity of a good powerful shower. Within seconds I was soaked to the skin. The shower stopped and I began to peel off my sodden clothes. I had just about stripped when the shower started up again. Evidently it went off periodically, every three or four minutes in the fashion of a pissoir. Stripped naked, I was heartily glad of the downpour, for I had sweated fairly profusely in my walk up the mountain. Clearly the liquid coming down on my head was essentially water but it had a soapy feel about it. I stood up to about half a dozen bouts, in which I washed out my clothes as best I could. Then I carried the whole dripping caboodle back to my box. It would take several hours, I thought, for the heavier garments, particularly the trousers, to dry out, so I resolved to try for some sleep. As I dozed off I wondered what items I might lack for in this singular situation. I had no razor, but then why not grow a beard? By the greatest good fortune I always carry a small pair of scissors in my rucksack. At least I could eat, keep clean, and cut my nails.

I slept much longer than I intended, nearly ten hours. When I awoke I noticed that the box-door, cell-door if you like, was open. Before touring again through the passageways, or patronising the privy with its remarkable drenching qualities, I tested the metal oven door. A new platter was there, piled high with the same vegetable marrow stuff.

My clothes were snuff dry. So the humidity had to be quite low, as I had thought was probably the case. I trotted along to the showers in my underpants only, for these would easily be dried should I misjudge the pissoir. The panel fortunately was open, it remained open from that time on so far as I am aware, so I waited for the flush, then darted in and darted out before the thing fired itself for the next occasion. At the best of times my mountaineering clothes are distinctly rough. After their recent wetting and drying they were now baggy and down-at-heel in the extreme. I saw no point in putting on my boots and simply went barefoot, rather like a ship-wrecked mariner.

I padded along the passage knowing that sooner or later I

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would reach the 'cathedral', as I had come to think of the big rectangular box. Another box was open, different certainly from mine and different I thought from that of Giselda Horne. I was just on the point of stepping inside when a voice behind me said, "hello," in a foreign accent. I turned to find an Indian of uncertain middle-age standing there. He stared rather wildly for perhaps thirty seconds and reached for support against the wall. To my surprise he went on:

"It is not the stomach sickness. It is a matter of shock to see you, Sir, for I attended a lecture you gave in Bombay last year. Professor Wycombe is it?"

"I did give a lecture in Bombay. You were in the audience?"

"Yes, but you will not remember me. It was a rather large audience. Daghri is my name, Sir."

We shook hands, "You have been in the big room, Sir?"

"Yes, many times."

"Recently, Sir?"

"Yesterday. That's to say before I slept. Perhaps ten hours ago."

"Then you will find it has changed."

Daghri and I hurried along the passages until we emerged into the cathedral. On the walls now were a mass of points of light, stars obviously. The projection on to the flat surfaces introduced distortions of course, but this apart we were looking up at a complete representation of the heavens, both hemispheres.

"What does it mean, Sir?" whispered the Indian.

For the moment I made no attempt to answer this critical question. I asked Daghri to tell me how he came to be there. He said he remembered walking out in the evening in the Indian countryside. Then suddenly, in a flash it seemed, he was in this big cathedral room. It appeared almost as if he had walked around a corner in the road to find himself, not in the countryside anymore, but right there in the middle of this room, more or less at the exact spot where I myself had wakened.

Accepting that both Daghri and I were sane, there could only be one explanation:

"Daghri, it must be that we are in some enormous spaceship. This display here on the walls represents the view from the ship. We're seeing the pilot's view out into space."

"My difficulty with that thought, Sir, is to find the Sun." I pointed to the bright patch lighting the entrance to the passageway,

"That, I think, is the Sun."

"Is there any way to make sure of this, Sir?"

"Quite easily. All we need do is sit and watch. The motion of the ship, if we are in a ship, must produce changes in the planets. We only need to watch the brighter objects."

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Within half an hour we had it, the apparent motion of the Earth itself, for the Earth-Moon combination was easy to pick out, once you looked in the right direction. Within an hour or so we had Venus and Mars, and already we knew the rough direction we were travelling—toward the constellation of Scorpius. We also knew the approximate speed of the ship, something above two thousand miles an hour. Reckoning the ship to be accelerating smoothly, and trusting to time from my watch, I was able to check the acceleration itself. It was quite close to ordinary gravity, a bit larger than gravity as I calculated it. This might well be the difference I had noticed in my legs right at the beginning.

It was while we were thus watching the display on the walls of the cathedral that the others slowly filtered in, one by one over a period of about five hours. The first to appear was a sandy-haired man going a bit thin on top. He announced himself as being of the name Bill Bailey, a butcher from Rotherham, Yorkshire, and where the hell was he he'd like to know, and where was the bacon and eggs, and who was the bird he'd seen in the bloody showers, half-naked she was but he didn't object to that, the more naked the better so far as he was concerned. For a badly frightened man it was a good performance. Although I never took to Bill Bailey, the never-ending stream of ribald remarks which issued from his lips served in the months ahead to lighten a thoroughly grim situation, at any rate so far as I was concerned.

There were two other men and four women, making a total of nine captives. Of the whole nine of us only two had been acquainted before, Giselda Horne and Ernst Schmidt, a German industrialist. Schmidt and the girl's father were in the same line of business, meat-packing, and Schmidt had been visiting the Horne family in Chicago. He and Giselda had been swimming in the household pool when the 'snatch', as I liked to call it, had taken place. Schmidt had suddenly found himself in the central part of the 'cathedral', clad only in his swimming trunks. Giselda had found herself in one of the cell-like boxes attired in her dressing gown. Schmidt was pretty mad about the trunks, for obviously there was no chance of him acquiring any decent clothes here. Since we were not permitted to touch each other, since the temperature in the ship was a dry seventy degrees or thereabouts, there really wasn't any logical reason for clothes. Nevertheless I could see Schmidt's point. I gave him the anorak out of my rucksack. Although it was no doubt ludicrous, he was glad to wear it.

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Jim McClay was a tall wiry Australian sheep farmer of about thirty-five. He had been snatched while out on his farm driving a Land Rover. Then he too was suddenly in the middle of the cathedral. The experience had very naturally knocked a good deal of the spring and bounce out of the man. But the confidence would soon return. I could see it would return by the way he was looking at Giselda Horne. She was a natural for the Australian, tall too and well muscled.

Bill Bailey greeted each of the four women in his own broad style. For Giselda Horne, in a cleaned dressing gown, it was no more than a terse "Take it off, love, come in an' cool down."

He didn't get far with Hattie Foulds, a farmer's wife from northern Lancashire. To his "Come in, love, come right in 'ere by me. Come in to me lap an' smoulder," she instantly retorted with "Who's this bloody great bag of wind?"

Nevertheless it was clear from the beginning that Hattie Foulds and Bill Bailey made a 'right' pair. As the days and weeks passed they made every conceivable attempt to get into physical contact with each other. It became a part of our everyday existence to walk past some spot from which the sound of violent retching emerged. The other women affected disgust, but I suspect their lives would also have been the poorer without these strange sexio-gastronomic outbursts. Bailey never ceased to talk about it, "Can't even match your fronts together before it hits you," he would say, "but we've got to keep on trying. Rome wasn't built in a day."

The two remaining women were much the most interesting to me. One was an Englishwoman, a face I had seen before somewhere. When I asked her name, she simply said she had been christened 'Leonora Mary' and that we were to call her what we pleased. She came in that first day wearing a full length mink coat. She was moderately tall, slender, dark with fine nose and mouth. A long wolf whistle from Bailey was followed by "Enjoy yer shower, baby?"

This must be the woman Bailey had seen. She must have got herself trapped in the deluge exactly as I had done. With most of her clothing wet she was using the mink coat as a covering.

The remaining woman was Chinese. She came in wearing a neat smock. She looked silently from one to another of us, her face like stone. Under her imperious gaze, Bailey cracked out with "Eee, look what we've got 'ere. 'ad yer cherry plucked, love?"

They wanted to know about the stars, about the way Daghri and I figured out where we were going and so on and so forth. As the

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hours and days passed we watched the planets move slowly across the walls. We watched the inner planets getting fainter and fainter while Jupiter hardly seemed to change. But after three weeks even Jupiter was visibly dimming. The ship was leaving the solar system.

Of all these things everybody understood something. It was wonderful to see how suddenly acute the apparently ignorant became as soon as they realised the extent to which their fate depended on these astronomical matters. Throughout their lives the planets had been remote recondite things. Now they were suddenly as real to everybody as a sack of potatoes, more real I thought, for I doubted if any of us would ever see a potato again, erroneously as it turned out.

Of the Einstein time dilatation they could make out nothing at all, however. It was beyond them to understand how in only a few years we could reach distant stars. I just had to tell them to accept it as a fact. Where were we going they all wanted to know. As if I could answer such a question! All I could say was that we had somehow been swept up by a raiding party, similar to our own parties rounding up animals for a zoo. It all fitted. Wasn't this exactly the kind of setup we ourselves provided for animals in a zoo? The boxes to sleep in, the regular food, the restrictions on mating, the passages and the cathedral hall to exercise in?

My longest conversations were with Daghri and with the aristocratic Mary. Mary and I found that so long as we kept about three feet apart we could go pretty well anywhere together at any time without falling into the troubles which were constantly afflicting Bill Bailey and Hattie Foulds. Quite early on, Mary wanted to know why we were so hermetically sealed inside this place. Animals in a terrestrial zoo can at least *see* their captors she pointed out. They breathe the same air, they glower at each other from opposite sides of the same bars. Not in the snake house or the fish tank I answered. *We* look in on snakes, we look in on fish, but it is doubtful if either look out on us in any proper sense. Only for birds and mammals is there much in the way of reciprocity in a terrestrial zoo. Mary burst out,

"But snakes are dangerous."

"So may we be. Oh, not with poison like snakes, perhaps with bacteria. This place may be a veritable horror house so far as our captors are concerned."

I was much worried about the Chinese girl, Ling was her name, for she had the problem of language to contend with as well as the actual situation. It was also very clear that Ling intended to be harshly uncooperative. I asked

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Mary to do what she could to break the ice. Mary reported that Ling 'read' English but didn't speak it, not yet. Gradually as the days passed we managed to thaw out the girl to some small degree. The basic trouble was that Ling had been a politician of quite exalted status in one of the Chinese provinces. She had been a person of real consequence, not in virtue of birth, but from her own determination and ability. She gave orders and she expected obedience from those around her. Her glacial attitude to us all was a general expression of contempt for the degenerate west.

Our clothes, while easily cleaned in the showers, became more and more battered and out of shape as time went on. We dressed as lightly as possible consistent with modesty, a commodity variable from person to person. One day Bill Bailey, clad only in underpants, came into the cathedral, threw himself on the floor and said:

"Oo, what a bitch! A right bitch that. Used to run real cockfights back on the farm, illicit-like. She'd take on any half-dozen men after a fight. Says it used to key her up, put her in tone. That's what we need 'ere, Professor, a bloody great cockfight."

Ling, who was standing nearby, looked down at Bailey.

"That is the sort of man who should be whipped, hard and long. In *my* town he would have been whipped for all the people to see."

The girl's expression was imperious, although her voice was quiet. Because of this, because also of her curious accent and use of words—which I have not attempted to imitate—the others, particularly Bailey, did not realise what she had said. To me the girl's attitude demanded action. I took her firmly by the arm and marched her along the passages—until we came to the first open cell. Strangely enough this action induced no sense of sickness in either of us.

"Now see here, Ling, you're not in China anymore. We're all *captives* in this place. We've got to keep solidly together, otherwise we're lost. It's our only strength, to give support to each other. If it means putting up with a man like Bailey you've just got to do it."

Even in my own ears this sounded flat and feeble, which is always the way with moderation and reason; it always sounds flat and feeble compared to an unrelenting fanatic or bigot. Certainly Ling was not impressed. She looked me over coolly, head-to-toe, and made the announcement, "The time will come when it will be a pity you are not ten years younger."

I was taking this as a left-handed compliment when she added another statement.

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"I shall choose the Australian."

"I think you'll have trouble from the American girl." Ling laughed—I suppose it was a laugh. The eyes I noticed were an intense green, the teeth a shining white. The girl must be using the soapy solution in the shower baths. It tasted pretty horrible but it allowed one to clean away the vegetable marrow food on which we were obliged to subsist.

I gave it up. The best I could see in Ling's point of view was that her ideology represented a last link with Earth. Perhaps it was her way of keeping sane, but it was entirely beyond me to understand it. I was much more impressed at the way Ling always contrived to look neat, always in the same smock.

We were undereating, because unless you were actively hungry there was no point in consuming the tasteless vegetable marrow stuff. It was mushy with a lot of moisture in it. Even so, I was surprised we managed without needing to drink, for there was no possibility of drinking the one source of fluid, the liquid in the shower bath. I could only think we were generating a lot of water internally, through oxidising the vegetable marrow material. Every now and then we had an intense desire to chew something really hard. I used to bite away at the cord from my rucksack, often for an hour at a time.

The natural effect of the undereating was that we were nearly all losing weight. I had lost most of the excess ten pounds or so which I never seemed to get rid of back on Earth. Ernst Schmidt had lost a lot more, so much in fact that he had discarded my anorak. He went around now only in the bathing trunks, which he had tightened in quite a bit. Getting fit had become a passion with the German. He had taken to running through the passages according to a systematic schedule, ten laps from the cathedral and back again for every hour he was awake. Sometimes I accompanied him, to give my muscles a little exercise, but I could never be so regular about it. He commented on this one day.

"A strange difference of temperament, Professor. We often have these little runs together, but you can't quite keep them up. Of course I understand you have not the same need as I. But even if you had the need, you couldn't keep them up. No, I think not."

"Personal temperament?"

"It is an interesting question. Both personal and national, I think. A misleading thing in politics—and in business—is the description given to your people. Anglo-Saxons, eh? What is an Anglo-Saxon, Professor, a sort of German maybe?"

"We're always supposed to be a kind of first cousins. There's the

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similarity of language for one thing."

"Accidental, imposed by a handful of conquerors. Look at me. I speak English. If you will pardon me, I speak it with an American accent. Does that make me an American? Obviously not. I speak this way because Americans have conquered my particular world, the business world."

"Go on."

"It is a pity we have no mirrors in this place. If we had a mirror, let me tell you how you would see yourself. You would see a tallish man, with a fair skin, a big red beard and blue eyes. You would see a Celt not a German. Your people are Celts, Professor, not Germans, and that is the true source of the difference in our temperaments, you and I."

"So-you think it goes a long way back?"

"Three thousand years or more, to the time when we Germans threw you Celts out of Europe. Yes, we understand a lot about each other, you and I, but we understand each other because we have fought each other for a long time now, not because we are the same."

I was surprised at the turn of the conversation. Schmidt must have noticed something of this in my face.

"Ah, you wonder how I can tell you these things? Because these things are my real interest, not the packing of meat, for who should be interested in the packing of meat?"

"What does all this lead you to?"

"We Germans can pursue a goal relentlessly to the end. You Celts can never do so. You have what I think is called an easy going streak. It was this streak which made the Romans admire you so much in ancient times. But it was this weakness which very nearly cost you the whole of Europe, my friend."

"To be easy going can mean reserve, you know, reserve energy in times of real crisis."

"Ah, you are thinking of winning the last battle. It was like that in each of the wars of this century, wasn't it? You won the last battles, you won those wars. Yet from victory each time you emerged weaker than before. We Germans emerged each time stronger, even from defeat."

"Because of a tenacity of purpose?"

"Correct, Professor."

"What is it you are really telling me, Herr Schmidt? That in whatever should lie ahead of us you will come out best?"

"A leader will emerge among us. It will be a man, an intelligent man. This leaves the choice between the two of us. Of the others the one is a buffoon, the other a simple countryman. Which of us it will be, I am not sure yet."

"Don't be too easy going, Herr Schmidt. You contradict yourself."

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Schmidt laughed. Then he became more serious.

"In a known situation a German will always win. He will win because all his energies are directed to a clear-cut purpose. In an unknown situation it is all much less sure."

I mention these events in some detail because there were three points in them which came together. Hattie Foulds and her cockfights, Ling and the whipping she would have liked to administer on the person of Bill Bailey, and now Schmidt's reference to himself as a meat-packer. It made a consistent theory, except for one very big snag, Daghri. I had a long serious talk with the Indian. He denied all my suggestions with such poise and dignity that I felt I simply must believe his protestations of innocence. My theory just had to be wrong. I became depressed about it. Mary noticed the depression and wanted to know what it was all about. I decided to tell her of the things in my mind.

"Every one of us is affecting an attitude, or considering some problem," I began.

"How do you know? About me for instance."

"You are considering the moral problem of whether you should permit yourself to bear children into captivity."

Mary looked me full in the face and nodded.

"My problem from the beginning," I went on, "has been to understand something of the psychology of the creatures running this ship. Zoomen, is the way I like to think of them. What the hell are they doing and why? Obviously taking samples of living creatures, perhaps everywhere throughout the Galaxy."

"You mean there might be animals from other planets on this ship?"

"Quite certainly, I would think. Through the walls of this cathedral, through the passage walls there will be other 'quarters', other rooms and passages with other specimens in them."

"Literally, a zoo!"

"Literally. Yet my curiosity about those other compartments and their contents is less than my curiosity about the human content of this particular compartment. There are nine of us, four of us from the British Isles, an American girl, a Chinese girl, an Indian, a German and an Australian. What kind of a distribution is that? Seven out of nine white. Can you really believe interstellar zoomen have a colour prejudice?"

"Perhaps it wasn't easy to grab people, they took the first they could get."

"Doesn't hold water. Geographically they snatched us from places as wide apart as Europe, America, India, Australia and China. They snatched McClay, Daghri and myself from the quiet countryside,

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they took you from the busy streets of London, Ling from a crowded town, Schmidt and Giselda Horne from the suburbs of Chicago. It doesn't seem as if the snatching process presented the slightest difficulty to them."

"Have you any idea of how it was done?"

"Not really. I just visualise it like picking up bits of fluff with a vacuum cleaner. They simply held a nozzle over you and you disappeared into the works."

"To come out in this place."

"It must have been something like that. Where had we got to, this colour business. Differences in colour might seem very unimportant to these zoomen. We only see these differences, like the differences between you and Ling, because an enormous proportion of the human brain is given over to the analysis of what are really extremely fine distinctions. It could be the zoomen hardly notice these distinctions, and if they do they don't think them worth bothering about."

"Then perhaps there was some other method of choice?"

"Must have been. If humans were snatched at random, a good half would be yellow or black. You'd only get a distribution as queer as this one if you had some system or other. But not a colour system."

"Sounds like a contradiction."

"Not necessarily. Right at the beginning it occurred to me that justice might be the criterion."

"Justice!"

"Look, if *you* were taking a number of humans into lifelong captivity, it might occur to you to choose the very people who had themselves shown the least feeling for the captivity of other animals, or for the lives of other animals."

"My coat!"

"Yes, your mink coat must have marked you out from the crowd in the street. The zoomen spotted it, and at the blink of an eye you were into their vacuum cleaner."

Mary shuddered and then smiled wryly,

"I always thought of it as such a beautiful coat, warm and splendid to look at. You really believe it was the coat? I only use it for a pillow now."

"A lot of things fit the same picture. Schmidt was a meat-packer. Giselda Horne's father was in the same business, stuffing bloody bits of animals into tins."

Mary was quite excited, her own plight forgotten as the puzzle fitted into place.

"And McClay reared the animals, and Bailey was a butcher, an actual slaughterer."

"And the cockfights for Hattie Foulds."

"But what about you, and Ling, and Daghri?"

"Leave me out of it. I can make a good case against myself. Ling and Daghri are the critical ones.

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You see there isn't much animal-eating among Asiatic populations, really because they haven't enough in the way of feeding stuffs to be able to rear animals for slaughter. This seemed to me to be the reason why only two Asiatic people had been taken. It occurred to me that possibly even these two might have been chosen in some other way."

"What about Ling?"

"Well, to Ling people are no more than animals. I've little doubt Ling has had many a person whipped at her immediate discretion, at her pleasure even for all I know."

"And Daghri?"

"Daghri is the contradiction, the disproof of everything. Daghri is a Hindu. Hinduism is a complicated religion, but one important part of it forbids the eating of animals."

"Perhaps Daghri doesn't have much use for that aspect of his religion."

"Exactly what I thought. I charged him with it directly, more or less accusing him of some form of violence against either animals or humans. He denied it with the utmost dignity."

"Maybe he was lying."

"Why should he lie?"

"Perhaps because he's ashamed. You know, Daghri is different in another way. What odds would you give of taking nine people at random and of finding none with strong religious beliefs?"

"Very small, I would imagine."

"Yet none of us has strong religious beliefs, except Daghri."

I saw exactly what Mary meant. To Daghri, religion might be no more than a sham. Perhaps the Indian was no more than a gifted liar.

Not long after this conversation Daghri disappeared. For a while I thought he had retired, possibly in shame, to his box-like cell. In one of my runs with Schmidt I noticed all the cells open. Daghri was not to be found in any one of them. We searched high and low, but Daghri simply was not there. 'High and low' is an obvious exaggeration, for there wasn't any possible hiding place in our asceptic accommodations. It was rather that we looked everywhere many times. Daghri was gone. The general consensus was that the poor fellow has been abstracted by the zoomen for 'experiments'. I was of a similar mind at first, then it all clicked into place. I rushed into the cathedral. The others quickly followed, so we were assembled there, eight of us now. I studied the star pattern on the wall. We hadn't bothered with it of late, treating it more as a decoration than as a source of information.

What a fool I'd been! I should have noticed the slight shift of the patterns back to their original forms. Owing to the motion of the ship, the stars had moved very slightly, but now they had moved

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back. The planets were there too, the planets of our own solar system. The double Earth-Moon was there. So was the sunlight replacing artificial light at the entrance of the passageways—there was a small subtle difference.

"We're being taken back," I heard someone say.

I knew we were not being taken back. Daghri had been taken back, the contradiction had been removed. My instinct had been right; Daghri had been telling the truth. Daghri had ill-treated no animal; Daghri was saved, but not so the rest of us. The planets moved across the wall, just as before. We were on our way out again.

The others couldn't believe it at first, then they didn't want to believe it, but at last, as the hours passed, they were forced to believe it. Disintegration set in quickly. Giselda Horne gave way badly. She seemed big and strong, but really she was only an overdeveloped kid. I thought she might be better alone, so I took her back to her own cell. She nodded and went in. Silently, from behind me, Ling glided after Giselda Horne. I shouted to Ling to come out and leave the girl alone. Ling turned with a look of haughty indifference on her face. At that very moment the panel of the cell closed. There was just a fleeting fraction of a second in which I saw the expression on Ling's face change from indifference to triumph.

The others gathered outside the cell. We could hear nothing from inside, for the panel was completely sound proof. The Chinese girl had judged the situation quite exactly. Giselda Horne was near the edge of sanity. With cutting and sadistic words, and with the force of a intense personality, Ling would push her over that edge.

The panel slid open. Horror-stricken, I gazed inside. Horror dissolved to laughter. Gone was Ling's neat smock. Blood was oozing from long scratches on Giselda Horne's face. Ling had evidently fought cat-like, as I would have anticipated. Giselda Horne had fought in a different style. One swinging fist must have hit Ling on the mouth, for it was now puffy and bleeding. A fist had also whacked the Chinese girl a real beauty on the left eye. Ling staggered out, leaving Giselda Horne with a big smile on her face.

"Gee, that was real good," said the American girl.

It was two days, two waking and sleeping periods, before I saw Ling again. She still contrived to appear reserved and haughty, even though the furious set-to had left her with the blackest eye I ever saw and with hardly any remnants of clothing.

"The American girl and I, we will share the Australian," Ling said. "It is a pity you are not five years younger," she added.

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Mary took it all with a great calmness.

"I'd become reconciled to it, captivity I mean. This really proves the zoomen have a sense of justice, to go back all that way to put Daghri home again."

Somehow I couldn't tell Mary. I knew the zoomen hadn't made any mistake about Daghri. It was an experiment, done quite deliberately to see how we would react. The zoomen just couldn't have read me so accurately and Daghri so badly. With Daghri gone, we made eight, four couples—the animals came into the Ark. Another thing, choose a smallish number. Being an irrational creature a human might say, 7. A really rational creature would always choose a binary number, 8.

Mary put a hand lightly on my arm.

"You never said what it was *you* had done."

"My sin was the worst of you all. My sin was that I was a consumer. I ate the poor creatures McClay reared on his farm, the animals Bailey slaughtered, the bloody bits Schmidt stuffed into tins."

"But millions do the same. I did, everybody does!"

"Yes, but they know not what they do. *I* knew what I was doing. For twenty years now I've been clear in my mind about it. Yet I've gone on taking the line of least resistance. I made minor adjustments, like eating more fish and less meat, but I never faced the real problem. I knew what I was doing."

The weeks passed, then the months. For some time, Mary and I have shared the same cell for sleeping. We had no trouble with the sickness, even when we shared my rucksack for a pillow. The same favour was not immediately extended to the others. The favour perhaps was granted because I had kept my small scrap of knowledge about the zoomen strictly to myself.

The day did come, however, when the others were allowed into physical contact. There was no mistaking the day, for Bill Bailey appeared in the cathedral clad only in his now tattered underpants, shouting,

"Bloody miracle. We got on last night, real good and proper." Then he was off, high stepping, knees up, like a boxer trotting along the road. Round and round the cathedral he went chanting,

"Raw eggs, raw eggs, mother. Oh, for a bloody basin of raw eggs."

Giselda Horne was standing nearby.

"What does it mean? she asked rather shyly.

"It means, my dear, that we're only nine months away from our destination," I answered.

This narrative was discovered in curious circumstances many

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many years after it was written, indeed long long after it had become impossible to identify Meall Ghaordie, the mountain mentioned by its author.

Landing on a distant planetary system, the crew of the fifth deep interstellar mission was astonished to discover what seemed like a remarkable new species of humanoid. The language spoken by the creatures was quite unintelligible in its details but in the broad pattern of its sounds it was strikingly similar to an archaic human language.

The creatures lived a wild nomadic existence. Yet they were imbued with a strong religious sense, a religion apparently centering around a 'covenant', guarded day and night in a remote stronghold. It was there, in a remote mountain valley, that the creatures assembled for their most solemn religious ceremonies. By a technologically-advanced subterfuge, access to the 'covenant' was at length obtained. It turned out to be the story of the 'Professor', reproduced above without amendations or omissions. It was written in a small book of the pattern of an ancient diary. This it was the creatures guarded with such abandoned ferocity, although not a word of it did they understand.

The manuscript has undoubtedly created many more problems than it has solved. What meaning can be attached to the fanciful, anatomical references? What was 'Munro-bagging'? These questions are still the subject of bitter debate among savants. Who were the sinister zoomen? Could it be that the Professor and his party turned out to be too hot to handle, in a biological sense of course, and that the zoomen were forced to dump them on the first vacant planet? The pity is that the 'Professor' did not continue his narrative. His writing materials must soon have become exhausted, for the above narrative almost fills his diary.

It was the appearance of the creatures which misled the fifth expedition into thinking they were dealing with humanoids, not humans. It was the unique combination of flaming red hair with intense green, mongoloid eyes. Did these characteristics become dominant in the mixed gene pool of the Professor's party, or was the true explanation more direct and elementary?

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Larry Niven, whose previous stories for us have been compelling tales of space flight (BECALMED IN HELL, *July 1965;* BORDERED IN BLACK, *April 1966*), *here turns to a classic fantasy theme and gives us a fresh and funny twist.*

THE LONG NIGHT

by Larry Niven

IT WAS A GIRL IN MY ANTHROpology class who got me interested in magic. Her name was Ann, and she called herself a white witch, though I never saw her work an effective spell. She lost interest in me and married somebody, at which point I lost interest in her, but by that time magic had become the subject of my thesis in anthropology. I couldn't quit, and wouldn't if I could. Magic fascinated me.

The thesis was due in a month. I had a hundred pages of notes on primitive, Medieval, Oriental and modern magic. Modern magic meaning psionics devices and such. Did you know that certain African tribes don't believe in natural death? To them, *every* death is due to witchcraft, and in every case the witch must be found and killed. Some of these tribes are actually dying out due to the number of witchcraft trials and executions. Medieval Europe was just as bad in many ways, but they stopped in time . . . I'd tried several ways of conjuring Christian and other demons, purely in a spirit of research, and I'd put a Taoist curse on Professor Pauling. It hadn't worked. Mrs. Miller was letting me use the apartment house basement for experiments.

Notes I had, but somehow the thesis wouldn't move. I knew why. For all I'd learned, I had nothing original to say about anything. It wouldn't have stopped everyone (remember the guy who counted every "I" in *Robinson Crusoe?*) but it stopped me. Until one Thursday night—

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I get the damndest ideas in bars. This one was a beaut. The bartender got my untouched drink as a tip. I went straight home and typed for four solid hours. It was ten minutes to twelve when I quit, but I now had a complete outline for my thesis, based on a genuinely new idea in Christian witchcraft. All I'd needed was a hook to hang my knowledge on. I stood up and stretched . . .

. . . And knew I'd have to try it out.

All my equipment was in Mrs. Miller's basement, most of it already set up. I'd left a pentagram on the floor two nights ago. I erased that with a wet rag, a former washcloth wrapped around a wooden block. Robes, special candles, lists of spells, new pentagram . . . I worked quietly so as not to wake anyone. Mrs. Miller was sympathetic; her sense of humor was such that they'd have burned her three centuries ago. But the other residents needed their sleep. I started the incantations exactly at midnight.

At fourteen past I got the shock of my young life. Suddenly there was a demon spread-eagled in the pentagram, with his hands and feet and head occupying all five points of the figure.

I turned and ran.

He roared, "Come back here!"

I stopped halfway up the stairs, turned and came back down. To leave a demon trapped in the basement of Mrs. Miller's apartment house was out of the question. With that amplified basso profundo voice he'd have wakened the whole block.

He watched me come slowly down the stairs. Except for the horns he might have been a nude middle-aged man, shaved and painted bright red. But if he'd been human you wouldn't have wanted to know him. He seemed built for all of the Seven Deadly Sins. Avaricious green eyes. Enormous gluttonous tank of a belly. Muscles soft and drooping from sloth. A dissipated face that seemed permanently angry. Lecherous—never mind. His horns were small and sharp and polished to a glow.

He waited until I reached bottom. "That's better. Now what kept you? It's been a good century since anyone called up a demon."

"They've forgotten how," I told him. "Nowadays everyone thinks you're supposed to draw the pentagram on the floor."

"The floor? They expect me to show up lying on my *back?*" His voice was thick with rage.

I shivered. My bright idea. A pentagram was a prison for demons. Why? I'd thought of the five points of a pentagram, and the five points of a spread-eagled man . . .

"Well?"

"I know, it doesn't make sense. Would you go away now, please?"

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He stared. "You *have* forgotten a lot." Slowly and patiently, as to a child, he began to explain the implications of calling up a demon.

I listened. Fear and sick hopelessness rose in me until the concrete walls seemed to blur. "I am in peril of my immortal soul—" This was something I'd never considered, except academically. Now it was worse than that. To hear the demon talk, my soul was already lost. It had been lost since the moment I used the correct spell. I tried to hide my fear, but that was hopeless. With those enormous nostrils he must have smelt it.

He finished, and grinned as if inviting comment.

I said, "Let's go over that again. I only get one wish."

"Right."

"If you don't like the wish, I've got to choose another."

"Right."

"That doesn't seem fair."

"Who said anything about fair?"

"Or traditional. Why hasn't anyone heard about this deal before?"

"This is the standard deal, Jack. We used to give a better deal to some of the marks. The others didn't have time to talk because of that twenty-four hour clause. If they wrote anything down we'd alter it. We have power over written things which mention us."

"That twenty-four hour clause. If I haven't taken my wish in twenty-four hours, you'll leave the pentagram and take my soul anyway?"

"That's right."

"And if I do use the wish, you have to remain in the pentagram until my wish is granted, or until twenty-four hours are up. Then you teleport to Hell to report same, and come back for me immediately, reappearing in the pentagram."

"I guess teleport's a good word. I vanish and reappear. Are you getting bright ideas?"

"Like what?"

"I'll make it easy on you. If you erase the pentagram, I can appear anywhere. You can erase it and draw it again somewhere else, and I've still got to appear inside it."

A question hovered on my tongue. I swallowed it and asked another. "Suppose I wished for immortality?"

"You'd be immortal for what's left of your twenty-four hours." He grinned. His teeth were coal black. "Better hurry. Time's running out."

Time, I thought. Okay. All or nothing.

"Here's my wish. Stop time from passing outside of me."

"Easy enough. Look at your watch."

I didn't want to take my eyes off him, but he just exposed his black teeth again. So—I looked.

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There was a red mark opposite the minute hand on my Rolex. And a black mark opposite the hour hand.

The demon was still there when I looked up, still spread-eagled against the wall, still wearing that knowing grin. I moved around him, waved my hand before his face. When I touched him he felt like marble.

Time had stopped, but the demon had remained. I felt sick with relief.

The second hand on my watch was still moving. I had expected nothing less. Time had stopped for me—for twenty-four hours of interior time. If it had been exterior time I'd have been safe—but of course that was too easy.

I'd thought my way into this mess. I should be able to think my way out, shouldn't I?

I erased the pentagram from the wall, scrubbing until every trace was gone. Then I drew a new one, using a flexible metal tape to get the lines as straight as possible, making it as large as I could get it in the confined space. It was still only two feet across.

I left the basement.

I knew where the nearby churches were, though I hadn't been to one in too long. My car wouldn't start. Neither would my roommate's motorcycle. The spell which enclosed me wasn't big enough. I walked to a Mormon temple three blocks away.

The night was cool and balmy and lovely. City lights blanked out the stars, but there was a fine werewolf's moon hanging way above the empty lot where the Mormon temple should have been.

I walked another eight blocks to find the B'nai B'rith Synagogue and the All Saints' Church. All I got out of it was exercise. I found empty lots. For me, places of worship didn't exist.

I prayed. I didn't believe it would work, but I prayed. If I wasn't heard, was it because I didn't expect to be? But I was beginning to feel that the demon had thought of everything, long ago.

What I did with the rest of that long night isn't important. Even to me it didn't feel important. Twenty-four hours, against eternity? I wrote a fast outline on my experiment in demon raising, then tore it up. The demons would only change it. Which meant that my thesis was shot to hell, whatever happened. I carried a real but rigid Scotch terrier into Professor Pauling's room and posed it on his desk. The old tyrant would get a surprise when he looked up. But I spent most of the night outside, walking, looking my last on the world. Once I reached into a police car and flipped the siren on, thought about it, and flipped it off again. Twice I dropped into restaurants and ate someone's order, leaving money which I wouldn't need,

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paper-clipped to notes which read "The Shadow Strikes."

The hour hand had circled my watch twice. I got back to the basement at twelve ten, with the long hand five minutes from brenschluss.

That hand seemed painted to the face as I waited. My candles had left a peculiar odor in the basement, an odor overlaid with the stink of demon and the stink of fear. The demon hovered against the wall, no longer in a pentagram, trapped halfway through a wide-armed leap of triumph.

I had an awful thought.

Why had I believed the demon? Everything he'd said might have been a lie. And probably was! I'd been tricked into accepting a gift from the devil! I stood up, thinking furiously. I'd already accepted the gift, but—

The demon glanced to the side and grinned wider when he saw the chalk lines gone. He nodded at me, said, "Back in a flash," and was gone.

I waited. I'd thought my way into this, but—

A cheery bass voice spoke out of the air. "I knew you'd move the pentagram. Made it too small for me, didn't you? Tsk, tsk. Couldn't you guess I'd change my size?"

There were rustlings, and a shimmering in the air. "I know it's here somewhere. I can feel it. Ah."

He was back, spread-eagled before me, two feet tall and three feet off the ground. His black know-it-all grin disappeared when he saw the pentagram wasn't there. Then—he was seven inches tall, eyes bugged in surprise, yelling in a contralto voice. "Whereinhell's the—"

He was two inches of bright red toy solider. "—Pentagram?" he squealed.

I'd won. Tomorrow I'd get to a church. If necessary, have somebody lead me in blindfold.

He was a small red star.

A buzzing red housefly.

Gone.

It's odd, how quickly you can get religion. Let one demon tell you you're damned . . . Could I really get into a church? Somehow I was sure I'd make it. I'd gotten this far; I'd out-thought a demon.

Eventually he'd look down and see the pentagram. Part of it was in plain sight. But it wouldn't help him. Spread-eagled like that, he couldn't reach it to wipe it away. He was trapped for eternity, shrinking toward the infinitesimal but doomed never to reach it, forever trying to appear inside a pentagram which was forever too small. I had drawn it on his bulging belly. ◄

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Senility brings with it a certain cantankerousness, and, if elderly people are a bit difficult to handle, aging animals may be even more so. If you ever run into a senile ape or ape-man, our advice is to yell "kagoda!" which, according to the Complete Ape-English Dictionary, means "I surrender." (The exclamatory inflection is important; "kagoda?" with a questioning tone means "Do you surrender?"—a crucial difference.) Remember this.

RELIC

by Mack Reynolds

HE WAS AN INOFFENSIVE OLD man, or should have been. In his day he had probably gone six and a half feet tall, and his thinning, white hair had undoubtedly been black, jet black. In his day the now grayish skin would have taken a tan as none other. In his day he would have put a Hawaiian beach boy to shame.

But this was no longer his day. There was a bit of the shamble in his walk, and his once wide shoulders drooped in the inevitable slouch of age. Still, there was some arrogance remaining.

Muttering the vexations of his years, he found himself a table and chair in the auto-cafeteria and peered unhappily at the menu set into the table top. He grumbled at the small type, peered about at his few neighbors, muttered again and brought forth a pair of steel-bound spectacles, one lens of which was cracked. He fumbled them onto his nose and went back to his perusal.

He said waveringly into the ordermike, "Steak tartare. Steak tartare without capers."

A mechanically tinny voice said, "We are sorreeeee, we do not include that dish in our menyouuu."

His tone was peevish now. "You take a pound of fresh ground raw sirloin, a half cup of finely chopped onions, an egg yolk, salt and pepper. Form the meat into a patty and make a small indentation into which you drop the egg yolk, then garnish with the onions."

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"We are sorreeeee, we do not include that dish on our menyouuu."

He glared at the mike for a long moment in frustration, but then sent his eyes back to the menu, his mouth working.

Finally he said, "A double tenderloin steak, very rare. Very rare, understand? Barely seared on each side. Nothing else, just the steak."

"Thank-kew."

He went back to his unconscious, faint mutterings while he waited.

Within five minutes, the delivery area of the table sank, to return with a large platter upon which rested an enormous steak.

Growling low in his throat, he reached forth and brought it to him. Almost as though it was an afterthought, he reached for knife and fork and jabbed the prongs of the latter utensil into the meat.

His quivering lips went back over yellowing teeth and he banged the fork back on the table.

He said querulously into the ordermike, "I said rare. I distinctly said very rare. This steak is burned to a cinder."

"We are sorreeeee. We cannot accept returns of orders. If you have ennnny complaints, please speak to the manager."

"Blitherit! I want another steak. A *rare* steak, understand?"

"We are sorreeeee. If you have ennny complaints, please speak to the manager."

An ordinarily faint scar across his forehead began to go reddish. His wavering voice found strength and he snapped, "By George, I'll do just that!"

Trembling his irritation, he shuffled to his feet, took up the platter complete with the debated steak and glared around the enormous dining room. Nobody bothered to look up from their automated feeding.

There was a sign at the far end of the restaurant indicating the preserve of the manager of this assembly-line eatery. He stomped in that direction, growling incoherently in his throat.

He pushed through the door without knocking, glared about through watery eyes. There was a desk, but no one at it. Beyond were rows of gleaming mechanized restaurant equipment, each device boasting impressive banks of dials, meters, switches and screens. A middle-aged man in shirt sleeves and with a harassed expression on his face prowled up and down. He would stare into a screen, automatically reach out and throw a switch; he would scowl at a dial, hover a finger over a button, but then shake his head and hurry on to the next device which, perhaps, was throwing a red light.

At the entrance of the newcomer, he looked around, his face as querulous as that of his indignant visitor.

He came up, after banging a re-

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lease which turned off the red light. "Now what!" he snapped. He put his hands on his hips.

"This steak . . ."

"What's the matter with the bloody steak? It looks all right to me."

"*That's* what's the matter with it!" the other snarled, with surprising fervor in view of his advanced years. "It is *not* bloody! I asked for a rare steak, do you understand!"

The restaurateur cast his eyes ceilingward, in search of divine guidance. "Fifty thousand meals a day. Fifty thousand, get it, and on top of all my other duties I've got to put up with cranky old duffers who don't know a good steak when they see one."

"Cranky old duffer, eh?" The older man growled low in his throat. "Listen, you young bounder, I was eating steaks better than this hydroponic farm-raised, overfat mush you call meat, before your grandfather knew what it was all about!"

He took the steak, platter and all and dashed it to the floor.

The harassed manager had had it today. He reached out to grasp the oldster's jacket front. "Now you clean that up! If you don't like our food, you needn't pay, but you're going to clean that . . ."

However, he had made his mistake.

At the touch of the hand, the low growling which had sounded no more than an old man's complaint, suddenly deepened, unbelievingly, to a warning rumble. And suddenly he who had been doddering crouched slightly and leapt backward, breaking the other's hold.

The growl became a snarl and thin hands shot out for the restaurant man's throat. Thin and veined, but they were hands of steel. Even as the younger man's eyes bulged terror, they tightened.

"Thus," the other was growling, "did I deal with Bolgani when but a boy. Thus did I deal with Terkoz. And thus do I deal with you, whom I respect no more than Dango the hyena."

The pressure of the hands on the throat tightened, and the victim's eyes bugged in stress. There was a sharp crack, the body lost its stiffness, the fists ceased their drumming on the horrible old man's chest.

The body dropped to the floor, and the oldster, glaring still, put one foot on it, beat his fists against his chest, opened his mouth as though to roar, but then caught himself. He looked down at his victim, obviously dead, went back into a semi-crouch and darted his eyes about the restaurant's office, *cum* kitchen control center. There were no others present.

He hurried his way to what was obviously a back door, probably leading onto an alley from which restaurant supplies could be unloaded by the robos.

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Lieutenant Webster entered after a grumbled response to his knock and looked at his chief.

Cosgrove looked back as though in weary resignation. "Well?"

"Sorry to bother you, Inspector. You said anything at all, anything that might be a lead."

"What've you got now?"

"Probably nothing. You know this kid from TransWorld?"

"Stimbol? That young cloddy they sent over to haunt us. What in Zen do they need a reporter for in this day and age?"

"Well, he's got a bug in his bonnet."

"About the Monster? What is it?"

"He wouldn't tell me."

"Send him in," Inspector Cosgrove sighed. "He's probably been watching some of those old TriD tapes where the intrepid reporter solves the crime."

Webster left and shortly after Jerry Stimbol entered. He couldn't have been more than twenty-five and actually looked a good five years younger. He was too thin, too intense, and made the Inspector tired just to look at him. He carried a couple of books and some folders in his hands.

Cosgrove said, "Well? Webster said this idea was so hot you wouldn't tell him about it. You got some angle for a story?"

The cub reporter said, "Now look, Inspector, let me build up to this. Don't say no until you've thought about it. I think I've got it all figured out." He scowled unhappily. "Except why he came to America, and how he's maintaining himself."

Cosgrove sighed again. "Let's hear your fling, son."

The reporter approached, laid his books and folders down on the other's desk and pulled up a chair. He scratched between his nose and upper lip, as though he had a mustache, which he didn't.

"Well, now look at this first." He handed over the heavier of the books, opened and with a section marked with a penciled box.

Cosgrove kept the place with one finger, looked at the cover.

"Burke's *Peerage?*"

"Yes, sir, I got it from the library."

The Inspector shrugged and began to read, muttering a word or two from time to time. "Greystoke . . . viscount . . . West Africa . . . married . . . Porter, an American . . . one son . . ."

He finished finally and looked up. "All right, so what?"

"Look at the date of his birth."

The Inspector looked. "All right, late 19th Century. So?"

"Look at the date of his death."

"It doesn't give a date of death."

"I know," Stimbol said.

The Inspector looked at him.

Stimbol said nervously, "Sir, have you ever considered how many fictional characters are actually based on real people?"

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The Inspector held his peace.

The reporter squirmed in his chair. "Take Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer; both were boys Mark Twain had known in Missouri. In fact, Tom Sawyer *was* Mark Twain; he was autobiographical. Take that other classic character of early American literature, Mike Hammer. Did you know he was based on a real private detective Spillane knew?"

He hurried on, as though afraid the other would interrupt him. "Jack London's characters were often based on real people, and certainly Scott Fitzgerald's were. Take Hemingway's colonel in 'Across the River and Into the Trees'; he was based on a real person."

"All right," the Inspector said. "I get your drift."

"Well, what I'm driving at, isn't it probable that a lot of other supposedly fictional characters were actually strongly based on actual people?"

"Greystoke," the Inspector muttered. "West Africa. Wait a minute. Some story tapes I used to scan when I was a kid."

Stimbol leaned forward. "Yes," he said excitedly. "Based on a real person. Brought up by animals as a boy. Other cases have been known. Saw some fantastic adventures in early Africa. Somehow, the author of the stories got in touch with him and fictionalized his experiences."

The Inspector snorted. "Fictionalized is right. They're some of the most far out yarns of all time." He snorted again. "My old man used to wallop me for reading them. What're you leading up to?"

The young reporter opened one of his folders. "Now, I don't know how many of the books you read when you were a kid, but I could almost recite them. Here's a list in correct order, that is, chronological."

"I remember vaguely," the Inspector said. He grinned suddenly. "Remember that one where all the men had tails?"

"And the one where he got reduced to the height of about one foot?"

"And the time he found the city of gold?"

They were both laughing.

The Inspector stopped suddenly. "What in Zen's this got to do with our drivel-happy killer?"

Stimbol, seemingly ignoring the question, took up another folder. "Well now, what you said just now ties in. This mysterious Monster doing all these meaningless killings obviously needs psychiatric care. Now, you notice in those books that whoever was doing the story telling continued to go further and further out. The first one was admittedly a hard to believe adventure yarn, but it was downright conservative compared to what came later. Toward the end, he was even doing such

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things as going to the center of the earth, not to speak of finding lost colonies of Crusaders and lost Roman Legions in the middle of Africa."

"What's all this jetsam got to do with . . ." the Inspector ground to a halt. His eyes narrowed. Now he rasped, "Oh, no."

"Now wait a minute, sir. Now, look. My theory is that as the years went by, he was slipping further and further into paranoia. All you have to do is read the books. He was getting delusions of grandeur. Patrolling the jungles and deserts, righting everything *he* thought was wrong. A regular one man lynch law to himself. Killing off everybody who hindered him in no matter how small . . ."

The Inspector was on his feet. He said, his tone very low and even, "Get . . . out . . . of . . . here. You silly clod, get out of my office. In fact, get out of the building!" His voice was rising now, just short of the shrill point. "I'm issuing immediate orders to Roberts that if you ever show your stupid face around here again . . ."

The keeper said, "Hey there, old boy, don't pester the anmuls!"

The other looked around. He had obviously ducked under the steel rail in order to get nearer to the cages.

He said testily, after noting the keeper's blue uniform, "I am not pestering the animals, as you put it. I am talking to my friend here, Manu, the monkey."

"Oh," the custodian said with sour cynicism. "And what did he say?"

"Manu says he is unhappy penned up in this hut of steel. He says it is not fit for a Gomangani, and well is it known throughout the jungle that the Gomangani will live in filth."

The keeper hadn't bothered to follow. The monkey was upset, all right. The old yoke must have scared him. The little fellow was chattering and jittering and running around the back of his cage as though something was after him.

"Okay, okay," the keeper said. "But suppose you go on about your business. If the monk has any complaints he can tell them to the curator."

The old timer looked at him levelly. "You seek to jest with me? Even the balus will tell you it is not wise to jest with the Lord of the Jungle."

Oh, great. Another screwball. Last week they had some kid of supposedly Spanish descent who'd hopped into a grazing pen with a bull, armed with a red colored blanket. He was, he explained later, in the curator's office, an *espontáneo,* getting in a bit of practice in case the *fiesta brava* ever made a comeback.

"Listen, all I'm telling you, old man, is if you bother any more of

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the anmuls I'll run you in. Can't you read those signs? Don't feed or tease the anmuls."

"But I had planned to exchange greetings with Tantor."

"Who in Zen's Tantor?"

A thin red line, obviously an old scar, was beginning to manifest itself across the other's forehead. "Tantor! Tantor the elephant!"

The other shook his head in sour despair. He reached out to grasp the old man's arm with the intention of escorting him to the gate.

A few minutes later on the other side of the zoo, one of the visitors came to a sudden halt, his face scowling puzzlement.

"What's the matter, dear?" his wife said. She hated these weekly expeditions to look at the animals. For that matter, she hated the half dozen years her husband had spent stationed in Africa; it was all the old bore ever talked about.

He said, "I didn't know they had a gorilla here."

"They haven't," she said. "We've seen every motheaten beast in the place twenty times over. No gorillas."

The sound came again.

"There. Did you hear it? The roar of a bull gorilla, proclaiming its victory. Or, at least, something awfully like a gorilla."

His wife made a contemptuous moue. "If that was a gorilla roaring victory, it must have been a conquest of some flea that had been giving it a hard time. You've got a glass ear, darling. Didn't you hear that squeaky break when he hit high? If that's a gorilla, it's a mighty decrepit one."

"I still say it sounded like a gorilla," her husband said argumentatively.

The body of the keeper wasn't found until several hours later. It had been hidden in the rushes in the duck pool.

The editor-in-chief had closed his eyes in acute pain long minutes before. Under his breath he murmured something that involved somebody's uncle owning a controlling share or otherwise he would . . .

Finally he said, "Now look, Jerry. Let's be astute about this. I read those books when I was a kid, just the way you did. In fact, I was the neighborhood authority. It wasn't until I was in my middle-teens that I found out such little discrepancies as the fact that there isn't any jungle in Africa in which you could swing through the trees. Maybe in South America, but not Africa. It's mostly bush, or plains, or desert. Even the Ituri rain forest doesn't have the kind of trees you could swing through. You would have done better here in North America back when the live oak covered the country."

"Now I can explain that," Stimbol interrupted.

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"Hold it, blast it, let me add a few more little items. Those great apes that supposedly raised him. What were they, chimpanzees? Because that's the largest ape in Africa, other than the gorilla, and his foster parents supposedly weren't gorillas. And don't tell me they might have been orangutans, because they come from Borneo, and while the author we're talking about probably did more lousing up of geography than any other in history, I don't think he'd mistake West Africa for Sarawak."

"That's what I mean," Jerry Stimbol said plaintively, urgently. "I'll admit the author had never been out of the States until he'd written several of the books. The stories must have been told to him. Admittedly the teller probably magnified. Then, on top of the magnification, the author, in fictionalizing the accounts, magnified still more. And that's what eventually led to the trouble."

"What trouble?" the other grunted. He looked desperately at the sheaf of reports on his desk. On top was the latest Monster victim story, and here he was, like a yoke, spending his time on this kid's jetsam.

"It's like any kind of lie. To keep it going, it's got to grow bigger and bigger. In the first book and the second, he was a fairly easygoing type, trying to get along against an hostile environment. But to keep the reader's attention and to continue to receive the egoboo he was getting on a worldwide basis, he had to make the adventures further and further out, the lies bigger and bigger."

He scratched his upper lip nervously even as he scowled, trying to put his fling over against what he knew were impossible odds. He raised his voice to keep the other from interrupting.

"And it evidently got to be a worm in his brain. He really began believing it all. I wish I could figure out what he's doing in America, and how in the world he's maintaining himself."

His chief sighed deeply. "Look Jerry, let's let everything else go by. Let's admit everything you say is right. But there's just one other thing that's wrong."

"What?" the reporter demanded.

"He's *dead.*"

"Burke's *Peerage* doesn't say so."

The editor's voice was going impatient. "Now look. Remember, I read the damn books too. In the first one he's raised by the overgrown monks, okay. In the second one, he gets married to this mopsy, Jane. The third one is about his son. Mind you, all this takes place before the First World War. Both he and his son participate in that fighting against the Germans in Africa. Now, mind you, he's already a grandfather at that time. How in the name of Holy Jumping Zen can you suggest he's still alive?"

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Stimbol had been nodding, as though only awaiting his own chance to talk. Now he said doggedly, "It points out in one of the stories that he regularly got rejuvenations from a witchdoctor, or witchwoman, or something."

The editor's eyes closed in acute pain again.

Jerry Stimbol pressed it earnestly. "Would you deny that medical science makes it possible today to prolong life for at least a couple of hundred years?"

The eyes opened. "With organ transplants and all our modern developments, yes. But back before the first World War? And a Bantu witchwoman? No!"

Stimbol leaned forward. "You're being prejudiced. How about the primitives using foxglove as a heart stimulant before the laboratories ever dreamed of digitalis? How about the natives using the bark of the cinchona against malaria long before the supposedly scientific doctors dreamed of the real nature of the disease and of quinine?"

His superior glared at him, hopelessly.

The reporter thought he was making his point, at long last. He pushed his advantage. "Maybe whatever rites he went through were what finally sent him off his rocker. Possibly, to keep his youth, he took some native narcotic that wound him up with his screws loose."

The ire was rising fast. "Listen, Stimbol, whatever got you going on this?"

"Yes, sir," Jerry nodded, still thinking he was beginning to get through. "I traced the killings back. They didn't start here in Greater Washington. There was a similar outbreak in London, a few months before, same sort of thing. And when they started in Greater Washington, they stopped in England. But it was the London killings that gave me my first clue."

"So what happened in London?"

"He strung up one of his victims with a grass rope."

"A *grass* rope?"

"Yes, sir. Don't you remember? Even when he wore Western type clothing, he used to wind his grass rope around his stomach, underneath. That and his hunting knife were his last resort weapons. You remember how often he resorted to the hunting knife."

"As I recall from my childhood studies of our hero, he killed half the population of Africa with it, Negro, Arab and animal."

"Yes, sir," Stimbol beamed. "And note how many of these Monster killings are knife jobs. Oh, he's still got that old hunting knife all right."

"And I've got two more ulcers since you came in here and started this," the other told him nastily. "Now listen here, Stimbol, I've stopped caring who your uncle is

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and how much TransWorld stock he owns. You're off crime as of this minute, understand?"

The other was flabbergasted. "Off crime? You mean . . . you mean you're not going to let me follow through on the Monster story?"

"My boy, I wouldn't put you on a crime story that involved ten year-old kids pilfering from the pneumatic delivery chutes from the ultra-markets. How are you on covering marriages? Or, better still, obituaries?"

"But that's all automated," Jerry Stimbol wailed.

"We'll un-automate obits," his chief snarled. "As of now, it's the good old days in the obituary department."

The aged ape-man stretched out on his back, his hands behind his head, and stared up at the ceiling, his mind going back, as so often it did these days, to his memories of yesteryear.

It wasn't so easy to separate the real memories from the written accounts of his adventures. He should have been more firm with that blithering scribbling Yankee who had wormed out of him so many of his deeds of daring. Lot of confounded nonsense, mixed up with the reality. Those jewels he had, uhh, liberated in Opar, for instance. There hadn't been nearly as many as reported. In fact, they weren't exactly jewels at all, but sort of costume jewelry some itinerant Arab had unloaded on the local natives, largely made in Japan.

And that hand to hand battle he'd had with Bolgani, the gorilla. That was highly exaggerated. He hadn't been nearly as badly hurt as reported. The ape-man snorted. Of course, it was kind of a *baby* gorilla, but he'd forgotten to tell the American that. At any rate, he hadn't been nearly as hurt as came out in the published story. This scar he'd got across his forehead—he traced it now with a thin, freckled but still wiry finger. From the book accounts, you'd think the blow he had taken to his head had all but incapacitated him. Actually, his head still throbbed from time to time and seemed to get worse, now that he was older, but it wasn't as though Bolgani had all but finished him.

He scowled, his memory blurring then clearing again as he tried to send it back over the long years. Come to think of it, that Bolgani probably wasn't a gorilla at all. It had been kind of dim there in the forest. Possibly it had been a baboon. A moderately large baboon.

He shook his head. But no, he distinctly recalled that it was a full grown, bull gorilla. And he, the Lord of the Jungle, had killed it. He, the adopted son of Kala, who had nursed him. He of the tribe of the Mangani great apes,

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headed by Kerchak the king. He who had loved Teeka, the beautiful she ape. Yes, yes, he could remember quite clearly now, he had killed the giant Bolgani with his knife.

That was the trouble with his memories, these days, he told himself in continuing irritation. It was hard to recall where the reality ended and his memories of the books began. Those long years in the institution. He had passed the time reading the books over and over again.

He brushed that from his mind and shifted his position on the bed where he sprawled, fully dressed. Watery eyes went about the room, in disgust. Ha! This was not as it had been in the old days, when he had lived out in the great jungles and scorned a roof over his head.

How even the cities of the Tarmangani had changed. He'd had to search full many a day to find this cellar room with a window so that he could at least have fresh air, rather than conditioned, machinery polluted air, for his jungle-bred lungs. Yes, how all had changed.

He closed his eyes to shut out the here and now and sent his mind to dwell on Jad-bal-ja, the Golden Lion, and to Tantor the elephant and Sheeta the leopard. He pictured himself swinging through the trees clad in naught but a loin cloth. His spear and sometimes a shield slung on his back, along with his great bow and quiver of arrows, his rope slung over his shoulders, his long knife at his side.

He brought himself up at the memory. How in the name of heaven did that blithering scribbler expect him to be able to carry all that muck with him through the trees? Especially when he was also burdened down with a female Tarmangani who was often unconscious and couldn't even hang on.

But suddenly through the open window there came an odor which he could hardly believe. Surely, it couldn't be true. His once keen nostrils twitched.

He sat up quickly, bringing his feet around to the floor. Yes. Yes, it could only be.

His arch enemy, Ibn Jad, the Bedouin sheik who came to steal his Waziri youths to be sold as slaves to the Arabs of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Jad, the forgotten of Allah!

His nose twitched again even as he tottered over to the small bureau, opened the bottom drawer and dug out from behind the soiled clothing where he had hidden it, the long hunting knife once the property of his shipwrecked father.

This was an Arab smell if he had ever smelled one, and even his aged nose could not mistake an Arab. And he would wager all the

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jewels of the lost mines of Sheba that it was Ibn Jad—in spite of the fact that he'd managed to contract a slight cold in this impossible climate and had the sniffles.

In a half crouch, the failing ape-man left the building by his private entrance. Night had fallen and, as so often in the past, he was following a spoor.

Jerry Stimbol said unhappily, "Let's make it as brief as possible, I'm personally paying for this call."

"Very good, sir," the man in the screen said. "I have checked the records thoroughly. It would seem that his Lordship was never quite the same after Lady Jane ran off with the beatnik poet."

"Beatnik poet?" Jerry said blankly.

"Yes, sir. It seems that she left a note," the other continued stiffly. "She was an American, you know, and evidently not used to the ways of a British spouse."

"What did the note say?"

"She was evidently spiffed at his continually running off on what she called drunken expeditions. At least, she assumed they were drunken what with the stories with which he returned."

"Well, what happened then?"

The British private investigator cleared his throat. "Well, it would seem that his Lordship's son was somewhat distressed over the manner in which the African estates were being managed. Among other things, it would seem his Lordship was subsidizing a whole tribe of natives, continuing them in the primitive state they had originally known. Ornate head-dresses, spears, shields, war dances, that sort of thing, don't you know? Didn't allow them even bicycles, not to speak of Jeeps or station wagons."

"The Waziri," Jerry Stimbol breathed.

"Yes, sir, that would appear to be their tribal name, sir. Suffice to say, when his Lordship's son took the matter to the courts, the conduct of what remained of the once extensive estates was turned over to his management."

Jerry looked at his watch unhappily. A photo-phone call to London was no small item. "But the important thing," he said. "What happened to, uh, the Viscount?"

The Englishman looked down at his notes. "He was committed to a rest home in Leopoldville, the nearest suitable for a distinguished gentleman who insisted upon remaining in Africa."

"Committed to a rest home!" Jerry blurted.

"Yes, sir. It would seem that his Lordship put up quite a show before they were able to get him into a straitjacket. Several of the establishment's employees were reported indisposed for some time."

"Institutionalized in Leopold-

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ville," Jerry breathed. "And then what happened?"

"Why, sir, it is to be assumed he died there. His son acceded to the title."

"Now wait a minute. What do you mean *it is assumed* . . ?"

"Why, sir, as you know there were considerable civil disturbances in the Congo, during which most records were destroyed. That period was the very latest to which I could trace his Lordship."

"Well, are there any surviving members of the family now? Somebody I could get in touch with?"

"Theoretically, sir, the great-great-grandson of his Lordship now bears the title. However, it would prove rather difficult to contact him." The British investigator cleared his throat still once again. "It would seem he operates a, ah, honky-tonk, I believe is the American expression, in Singapore."

"Honky-tonk! I thought the family was rolling in dough? How about the jewels of Opar, the City of Gold, all the rest of it?"

The other said stiffly, "I wouldn't know anything about how the family acquired its original wealth, sir. I do know, however, that by the time his Lordship was committed to the, ah, rest home, he had spent considerable amounts for such, ah, rather unrewarding investments as space research."

"Space research!" Jerry shot an agonized glance at his watch.

"Yes, sir, however, it would seem that his Lordship failed even to get into orbit."

Jerry said, "Look, get all this on paper and rocket it to me."

"Certainly, sir, and I'll send my bill at the same time."

Jerry winced, even as the other's image failed.

For a long moment he stared at the empty screen. "I wish," he muttered, "I knew what he was doing in America, and how he's maintaining himself. Even if he had money, he couldn't get it out of England, what with the currency controls."

Jerry Stimbol was on the carpet.

"So you did it, eh!" his editor bellowed.

"Well, yes, sir, I guess I did. I wanted to warn people, bring home to them the nature of their danger."

His superior hit the paper spread out before him. "Half the sheets on our chain ran it. All of them treating it like a silly-season story. What does that make us look like? Right on top of that poor Arab Union consulate official getting his throat slit on the streets of Greater Washington. Right on top of that, to run a Monster story with a gag slant."

"It wasn't a gag, sir. I keep telling you. I have all the evidence. Remember all those terrible killings that took place in the Congo,

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way back when they were still fighting their civil wars?"

"What in confounded Holy Jumping Zen has that got to do with the Monster, and smuggling through a silly-season story?"

"Well, sir, my theory is that all that killing that took place wasn't committed by the Simbas."

"Listen," his superior said ominously. "Forget the Congo. How did you get this story on the wire?"

Jerry blinked his apprehension. "It seems that last night McPherson became indisposed."

"Indisposed! He was drenched! You filled him full of a lot of guzzle and then talked him into letting you take his place."

"Well, yes sir, in a way." Jerry Stimbol scratched his nonexistent mustache.

"I thought I told you you were off crime and on obituaries."

"Well, yes, sir. I just sort of used my own time to continue my theories on the Monster."

The editor beamed at him. "Oh, you did. And I suppose that in spite of all, you figure on continuing on your own time?"

Jerry felt emboldened. "Well, yes I do. After all, it's my time."

"And sooner or later, you'll figure out some way to get another story onto the wires, making TransWorld look like an idiot."

Jerry swallowed and kept his peace.

The beam in the other's eye had a growing ominous quality. "Well, Jerry my lad, guess what? We're taking you off obits here in Greater Washington. Yes, sir, you've been promoted."

"Promoted?"

"Jerry, old man, old demon reporter of the old school, obviously we couldn't come right out and fire you. Not with your uncle feeling the way he does about you starting at the bottom and working your way up in this business. On the other hand, you wouldn't quit under any circumstances. It might antagonize that same uncle. So we'll solve everything by just naming you . . ." his voice was rising to a crescendo now ". . . to be our sole representative in Byrd City, Antarctica!"

"Oh, *no*," Jerry whimpered.

"Oh yes, and we'll see just how many apes you run into there!"

The President of the United States of the Americas enjoyed a good press. Not since F.D.R. had the fourth estate found a chief executive so quick with the quip, so humorous of sally. They liked him. There was never a press conference but that you could count on a few laughs to lighten the load.

Today he sat in the news conference hall, flanked by Senator Fillite and Congressman Higgins and backed, as usual, by his press aides. The subject had been the dumping of Chinese surplus wheat on the world markets, and it had been a touchy one.

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The president at long last grinned and said, "Well, gentlemen, we've all been on the grim side today. Any last question?"

Someone called, "Mr. President, did you read the Trans-World dispatch on the identity of the Monster, this morning?"

The president grinned his famous grin, worth at least twenty million votes at the polls. "Yes, Bob, I did. And all I can say is that the Lord of the Jungle is going to have all the resources of the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. combined thrown against him."

Senator Fillite got into the act. "In fact, gentlemen, I plan to present to the Senate a declaration of war on this enemy."

Higgins was not one to let a bit of personal publicity go by. He puffed out his cheeks and announced, "I must remind the President and my honorable colleague of the Senate, that a declaration of war must pass *both* houses. However, the full support of the House of Representatives will be thrown into the matter, I can guarantee."

A laugh went through the room.

"Thank you, Mr. President," the senior newsman called.

In his dismal cellar room, the senile ape-man squinted the moist eyes that had once been the sharpest in the jungle. He was finding it difficult to read, these days, even with his spectacles.

But the story got through to him.

Though not the humor intended.

The government of the United States of the Americas had the audacity to seek him out as a common felon. It had, if he understood this blithering American newspaper correctly, declared war upon him. All, evidently, as a result of their objecting to his righteous wrath expressed against his foes.

What in the world was he doing in America, anyway? He scowled. Oh, yes. The last great expedition, the last great project. He was going to go to the rescue of John Carter, who seemed to be having a rough go of it, up there. He had finally given up trying to make enough money in such places as the carnival, to resume his own researches. He had read that the Americans were about to send a small colony to Mars. Very well, it would not be the first time the Lord of the Jungle, utilizing his jungle stealth, had stowed aboard some ship, or other transport.

He looked at the paper again. But this, obviously, must be attended to first.

It was not the first time he had been confronted by the combined force of a whole government. And he'd toppled whole governments before, and with very little assistance, as a rule. That Roman government of the lost Legion, or was he thinking of the two Crusader colonies, or still again, the degenerate government of Opar?

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It was hard to recall these things clearly, these days. It was lucky he periodically reread the books, to keep matters fresh.

At any rate, yes, it was obvious that this challenge must be met, if he was to keep his own respect and that of the world. The gauntlet had been thrown down, and never had one been so quick to take challenge as the ape-man. He had half a mind to go out onto the street and bellow the battle cry of the Mangani into the sky.

But no, the odds were great. The stealth of the jungle must be relied upon. He growled low in his throat and began to make plans. Finally, he came to his feet, went over to the bureau drawer in which he kept the long hunting knife and slipped that weapon into his belt, beneath his coat.

First he would go down to the relief offices and collect his unemployment insurance benefit check which these blithering Yankees seemed to hand out to anyone who applied.

Then he would start stalking these Senators and Representatives who evidently were the governing body of this mad country. What were the names of these two who had initiated the movement against him? Higgins and Fillite. They'd be first. He flexed his once mighty thews.

COMING NEXT MONTH . . .

. . . two new stories by two award-winning authors, **ROGER ZELAZNY** and **BRIAN W. ALDISS.**

Roger Zelazny was the winner of three of last year's major science fiction awards: two Science Fiction Writers of America *Nebula* awards and one *Hugo* award (for . . . AND CALL ME CONRAD, Oct.-Nov. 1965). His new novelet, DAWN, will be featured in our April issue. It is an adventurous tale, not only in terms of pace and action (of which there is plenty) but also in its equally compelling background of Hindu and Buddhist mythology.

Brian W. Aldiss, winner of a *Nebula* award (for THE SALIVA TREE, Sept. 1965) will also be on hand with RANDY'S SYNDROME, a strange story of a baby who refused to be born.

The April issue is on sale March 2; watch for it.

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CROWDED!

by Isaac Asimov

WHAT WITH ONE THING OR ANOTHER, I give a number of talks here and there, and these talks are usually followed by a question-and-answer period. That is the fun-part—or the agony-part, depending on how things go.

Very often the game of place-the-speaker-on-the-spot is played and the speaker, if he happens to be in rare form, can win with a quick and unexpected bit of repartee. The reward is a roar of laughter from the audience that is more warming than the honorarium.

I wish I could say that I am always ready with the crushing retort, but, alas, I am not.

Sometimes I come through however, and an example that shall live forever in my memory came once, just after I had looked at my wristwatch and said, as is customary, "I'm afraid we have time for only one more question."

Whereupon a young man in the audience jumped to his feet and said, "Dr. Asimov, could you give us, in the time remaining, your impression of what the world of the future will be like?"

And, without any perceptible hesitation, I answered, "Crowded!" and walked off the platform to a thunder of laughter and applause. —Oh, boy, if I could only do that every time.

But you know, it isn't the world of the future alone that is going to be crowded. We are already crowded, and I would like to demonstrate that fact in a way that has not yet been done to death.

For instance, I live in a suburb of Boston, and no one can call Boston a small town. It is not a huge metropolis, but it is a thoroughly respectable city. It has a population of just about 616,000, and it is the largest city in New England.

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And how many cities in the world do you think are larger than Boston? You may guess before you read further, if you wish—

Well, checking through the latest data in my library, I would estimate that there are at least 150 cities in the world that are larger than Boston. And somehow, as I stand in the shadow of the Prudential Tower and look about at the not-more-than 151st largest city in the world, I feel a little shrunken.

To be sure, Boston's boundaries are only an imaginary line on the map. Her houses and population spill over that line in every direction into a ring of suburbs, and the metropolitan area, or Greater Boston as it is called, has a population of some 2,600,000.

But we can't use that for comparison. Other cities have their metropolitan areas, too. Besides, a "metropolitan area" is not a single political entity. Each one of Boston's suburbs (and there are several dozen) has its own mayor, police and fire department, school system, and tax practices. This means that the "metropolitan area" is a hazy thing indeed, which grows and shrinks according to which suburbs you decide belong to it and which you decide don't. No, if we are going to try to come to some conclusions concerning cities, we had better choose something that is hard and fast, and that is the political city line.

There are a dozen cities in the United States alone that are larger than Boston, and, of these, six have a population of more than a million within the city limits proper. One million is a nice round number, so let's define a Great City, quite arbitrarily, as one that has a population of a million or more. The six Great Cities of the United States are, in order of population:*

The United States

City	*Population*
New York	8,080,000
Chicago	3,520,000
Los Angeles	2,740,000
Philadelphia	2,030,000
Detroit	1,600,000
Houston	1,100,000

The total population of these six Great Cities is just about 19,000,-

**I am not using the 1960 Census figures but the latest estimates I can find. I am doing the same for foreign cities where the estimates are often quite rough and unreliable, but what can you do—*

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000, and counting the population of the United States as about 195,000,000, this means that 9.7 percent of the American population, or just about one American in every 10, lives in a Great City. Consider the near-Great Cities and add the suburbs to all of them and our vision of small-town America vanishes in a puff of cliche.

But before you get so saddened you can't continue, let's ask a few questions, possibly amusing ones, concerning American cities. You'll find the answers at the back of the article but see how you do, first, without consulting maps and atlases. (I must admit I did.)

1- What is the largest city in the United States that is only the second largest city in its state?

2- What American city comes closest to being a Great City without being one?

3- The various American states tend to pick small cities as capitals out of a traditional distrust for big city "mobs." What is the largest city to serve as capital of a state?

4- What is the smallest?

Now let's move on. There are three countries that are more populous than the United States, and they are China (750,000,000), India (475,000,000) and the Soviet Union (230,000,000). Each, naturally, is rich in Great Cities. Let us begin with China, which has no less than sixteen Great Cities according to the best figures I can get:

China

City	*Population*
Shanghai	7,000,000
Peking	6,800,000
Mukden	3,100,000
Tientsin	2,900,000
Harbin	2,500,000
Chungking	2,200,000
Canton	2,150,000
Sian	1,500,000
Paotow	1,500,000
Taiyuan	1,500,000
Nanking	1,400,000
Lanchou	1,200,000
Poshan	1,200,000
Hsinking	1,150,000
Tsingtao	1,120,000
Chengtu	1,100,000

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This seems an amazing collection of huge cities at first glance, but it is less amazing if you stop to think about it.

Consider first how many Great Cities there are in the world. (Care to make a quick guess before I tell you?) Well, there are eighty-eight altogether. China has nearly one-fifth of all of them within her borders, but why not? She has more than one-fifth the population of the world within her borders, after all.

The total population of these sixteen Great Cities of China is about 38,000,000, just twice the Great City population of the United States. But then, China has three and a half times our population. Only five percent of China's population, or one out of 20, lives in a Great City. Compare this with our own one out of 10.

India has six Great Cities, and the Soviet Union has seven:

India

City	*Population*
Bombay	4,540,000
Calcutta	3,005,000
Delhi	2,300,000
Madras	1,840,000
Ahmedabad	1,250,000
Hyderabad	1,150,000

Soviet Union

City	*Population*
Moscow	6,334,000
Leningrad	3,218,000
Kiev	1,292,000
Gorky	1,066,000
Tashkent	1,061,000
Kharkov	1,048,000
Novosibirsk	1,013,000

The total population in the Great Cities of these countries is almost the same. It is 15,000,000 for the Soviet Union and 14,000,000 for India. However, India's total population is far greater than that of the Soviet Union, and that is reflected in the concentration of population within them. Whereas 6.5 percent of the population of the Soviet Union lives in its Great Cities, only three percent of the population of India do.

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But we are not through. There are many nations less populous than the United States, and one of them, with just half our population, nevertheless has seven Great Cities, one more than we do. You may have guessed that the nation is Japan. It's seven Great Cities are:

Japan

City	*Population*
Tokyo	8,730,000
Osaka	3,200,000
Nagoya	1,900,000
Yokohama	1,600,000
Kyoto	1,285,000
Kobe	1,115,000
Kitakyushu	1,000,000

The total Great City population in Japan is 18,800,000, nearly that of the United States. One out of every five Japanese lives in a Great City.

All other nations have fewer Great Cities within their individual borders than do any of those already mentioned, but put them all together and there are forty-six Great Cities remaining. These are listed below in order of population:

City	*Nation*	*Population*
London	Great Britain	8,185,000
Cairo	Egypt	3,518,000
Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	3,223,000
Mexico City	Mexico	3,193,000
Sao Paulo	Brazil	3,164,000
Seoul	South Korea	2,983,000
Buenos Aires	Argentina	2,967,000
Djakarta	Indonesia	2,907,000
Paris	France	2,780,000
Rome	Italy	2,455,000
Madrid	Spain	2,443,000
Teheran	Iran	2,317,000
Sydney	Australia	2,256,000
West Berlin	West Germany	2,193,000
Melbourne	Australia	2,003,000
Karachi	Pakistan	1,913,000

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Budapest	Hungary	1,900,000
Hamburg	West Germany	1,856,000
Milan	Italy	1,666,000
Vienna	Austria	1,634,000
Barcelona	Spain	1,634,000
Bangkok	Thailand	1,608,000
Caracas	Venezuela	1,590,000
Alexandria	Egypt	1,588,000
Bogota	Colombia	1,488,000
Istanbul	Turkey	1,467,000
Lima	Peru	1,436,000
Saigon	South Vietnam	1,336,000
Lahore	Pakistan	1,296,000
Pusan	South Korea	1,271,000
Bucharest	Rumania	1,236,000
Warsaw	Poland	1,232,000
Naples	Italy	1,221,000
Montevideo	Uruguay	1,203,000
Montreal	Canada	1,191,000
Munich	West Germany	1,182,000
Manila	Philippines	1,139,000
Turin	Italy	1,117,000
Birmingham	Great Britain	1,106,000
East Berlin	East Germany	1,071,000
Guadalajara	Mexico	1,048,000
Glasgow	Great Britain	1,036,000
Taipei	Nationalist China	1,028,000
Prague	Czechoslovakia	1,011,000
Surabaya	Indonesia	1,008,000
Leopoldville	Congo	1,000,000

We can now summarize this information, first by nations, then by continents and finally for the entire planet.*

There are thirty-six nations in the world that contain at least one Great City, and I will list them in order of total Great City population to the nearest hundred thousand:

I suppose that I ought to apologize for all these statistics but consider—If all else fails, what topics of conversation these will make for cocktail parties. "Guess how many cities there are with populations of more than a million?" you can begin.

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Nation	*Number of Great Cities*	*Total Great City Population*
China	16	38,000,000
United States	6	19,000,000
Japan	7	18,000,000
Soviet Union	7	15,000,000
India	6	14,000,000
Great Britain	3	10,300,000
Italy	4	6,500,000
Brazil	2	6,400,000
West Germany	3	5,200,000
Egypt	2	5,100,000
South Korea	2	4,300,000
Australia	2	4,300,000
Mexico	2	4,200,000
Spain	2	4,100,000
Indonesia	2	3,900,000
Pakistan	2	3,200,000
Argentina	1	3,000,000
France	1	2,800,000
Iran	1	2,300,000
Hungary	1	1,900,000
Austria	1	1,600,000
Thailand	1	1,600,000
Venezuela	1	1,600,000
Turkey	1	1,500,000
Colombia	1	1,500,000
Peru	1	1,400,000
South Vietnam	1	1,400,000
Canada	1	1,200,000
Poland	1	1,200,000
Rumania	1	1,200,000
Uruguay	1	1,200,000
Philippines	1	1,100,000
East Germany	1	1,100,000
Czechoslovakia	1	1,000,000
Nationalist China	1	1,000,000
Congo	1	1,000,000

Of course, total numbers aren't everything. What about Great City concentration of population? As I said earlier, 9.7 percent of the popula-

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tion of the United States live in Great Cities, but this is considerably exceeded by the percentage of the Japanese population that lives in Great Cities.

Does Japan hold the record? It does not. Three nations exceed its concentration of Great City population:

Nation	*Percent of Population in Great Cities*
Uruguay	45
Australia	38
Austria	22

Uruguay offers an astonishing spectacle. Almost half the population of that small land (a trifle larger than North Dakota in area) is squeezed into Montevideo, its capital and one Great City. The only thing I can think of which is comparable is the situation in New York State, somewhat smaller in size than Uruguay, but six and a half times as populous. Here 45 percent of New York State's population squeezes into its one Great City, New York City.

Australia is almost as lopsided. Almost two-fifths of its entire population dwell in its two Great Cities of Sydney and Melbourne. (It suddenly occurs to me that there are no less than 12 English-speaking Great Cities. This is surpassed only by the 16 Chinese-speaking ones.)

Perhaps even more astonishing is the case of Austria. Nearly one-quarter of its population crowds into its single Great City of Vienna. This must be considered in its historic setting. Prior to World War I, Vienna was the capital of Austria-Hungary, a much larger country than present-day Austria. The capital suited the country, but after World War I, Austria-Hungary was hacked into fragments and Vienna remained as the giant capital of a small remnant of the nation.

Budapest remained as the giant capital of another small remnant, so that nearly one-fifth of Hungary's population is crowded into that Great City.

There is a tendency among the older nations to have a Great City as their capital. Indeed, Warsaw, Paris, London, Bucharest, and many others grew and became Great Cities just because they were capitals.

Some of the newer nations, however, less encrusted with tradition, have deliberately created a capital, or adopted one, which is not a Great City, even though Great Cities are present and available in the nation. This is especially true of the English-speaking countries, with the glaring exception of Great Britain itself. Thus, we have Washington, D.C.;

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Canberra, Australia; and Ottawa, Canada; none of which are Great Cities. In nations long under English-speaking domination, we have Quezon City, Philippines; New Delhi, India; and Rawalpindi, Pakistan; again not Great Cities. Which leads me to—

5) There are three other nations among those possessing Great Cities which have non-Great City capitals. Which are they and what are the capitals?

Great Cities tend to exist in groups. The closest pair are West Berlin and East Berlin, but that is an accident of Cold War politics. They are essentially a single city, split between two governments.

Leaving that abnormal case to one side, the closest pair of Great Cities is Tokyo and Yokohama in Japan. The city limits of these two approach within four miles of each other. Compare this with the ninety miles that separate New York and Philadelphia, the closest American pair of Great Cities. Indeed, Japan also contains the best example of a Great City triplet. A squat triangle only thirty-five miles on its longest side will contain Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe. So—

6) What is the most isolated of the Great Cities; that is, the one farthest removed from any other?

7) What is the most northerly of the Great Cities? The most southerly?

8) What is the most populous nation *not* to contain a Great City?

But let's pass on to continents— Suppose we count offshore islands with the nearest continent: Japan and Indonesia with Asia, Great Britain with Europe and so on. Let's remember, too, that although Turkey is largely an Asian country, Istanbul is in the small segment of it that is in Europe. Let us remember, further, that two of the Great Cities of the Soviet Union (Tashkent and Novosibirsk) are in Asia. We have, therefore:

Continent	*Number of Great Cities*	*Total Great City Population*
Asia	42	91,700,000
Europe	25	51,300,000
North America	9	24,200,000
South America	7	15,100,000
Africa	3	6,100,000
Australia	2	4,300,000

The population of Europe and North America is more concentrated

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than that of Asia and South America. About 8 percent of the population of the first two continents lives in the Great Cities, as compared with not more than five percent of the population of the last two. Africa is far behind, with a concentration of only about two percent. It is Australia that carries off the award, though. Even counting New Zealand as part of the continent, the concentration is still 25 percent.

The total population of the eighty-eight Great Cities of the world is just about 193,000,000, almost exactly the population of the United States. This includes one out of every seventeen human beings on the Earth today.

And the number of Great Cities will increase each year, together with the total population living in them, both in actual numbers and in percentages of all humanity. I estimate that in the last half-decade alone, the list of Great Cities has increased by seven and their total population by 13,000,000.

Where it will all end, I don't know. I can only wait in terror as each day is more crowded than the one before. Ten years from now—if we are all still alive—I shall return to this theme and see how things have progressed.

Answers

1- Dallas, Texas; population 790,000—outstripped by Houston, Texas.

2- Baltimore, Maryland, with a population of 925,000.

3- Boston, Massachusetts (aha!) but the distinction may not be lasting. Boston's population is dropping quickly (80,000 in the last six years), and capital cities such as Denver, Colorado, may overtake it before long.

4- Juneau, Alaska; population 7,200.

5- Bonn, West Germany; Brasilia, Brazil; and Ankara, Turkey.

6- Mexico City. It is about 1500 miles from the nearest Great City, Los Angeles.

7- Leningrad is farthest north; Melbourne farthest south.

8- You would naturally look for this nation in the most under-concentrated continent, Africa. It turns out to be Nigeria, which has a population of 56,400,000 and is the ninth most populous nation on Earth. It doesn't have a single Great City. It's largest city, Lagos (its capital) has a population of 665,000.

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Here is the stunning conclusion of John Christopher's novel about the discovery of a group of miniature human beings, less than a foot in height. The problem of their origin has been solved, but other mysteries remain. They inspire vague feelings of fear in their discoverers, but is there truly anything to fear from them? If so, what? (If you missed the earlier parts, the author's synopsis will fill you in quickly and fully.)

THE LITTLE PEOPLE

by John Christopher

(conclusion)

SYNOPSIS: For a holiday away from it all, you could scarcely do better than Killabeg Castle, lying in the middle of Killabeg Bog, not far from the west coast of Ireland. Stefan Morwitz, a successful German businessman, son of an executed Nazi war criminal, brings his half-Jewish wife there. Waring and Helen Selkirk, threshing in a marriage of mutual hatred, arrive with their teen-age daughter, Cherry. The proprietress is Bridget Chauncey, brought up in England, who unexpectedly inherited the place, the previous winter, from an unknown Irish cousin. Also staying at the Castle are Bridget's fiance, Daniel Gillow, a London solicitor, and Mat O'Hanlon, a Dubliner in the same profession. He too, has fancied himself in love with Bridget, but is having to make do with the bottle and, to his surprise, with the open and trusting affection of young Cherry.

When Bridget first came to the Castle, she found a strange thing: a locked room in the old tower fitted up as a kind of laboratory-workshop but fantastically containing a set of dolls' houses. And the first night of his stay, Waring Selkirk, looking out from his window, thinks he sees in the moonlight a miniature human being. This is the land of the Little People of legend and though no one —not even Waring himself—believes that this is what he has seen—they begin to wonder.

Then Daniel, the stolid unimaginative Englishman, finds a footprint outside by the base of the tower: the impression of a sandal two inches long. Things have been missing from

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the house; from the kitchen, chiefly. Food, string, candles, a knife—apparatus for survival in a giant's world. Near the footprint there is a hole, leading down into the tower, with a length of green thread snagged on a sharp corner of stone. They search the cellars, part of which are flooded from the nearby lake. Among a mass of papers, Stefan finds a journal, written in German. Together, they discover a stub of candle. A street lamp for Lilliputians.

Something is going on, but what? A hoax, perhaps? A publicity stunt to bring the tourists flocking? They lay on a night watch, more for something to do than from a belief that there is anything to see. In the dark they hear sounds from a pile of junk against the wall dividing house and tower. Daniel flashes a torch on, and two tiny men dart back into the hole from which they have emerged. They have found the Little People, only to lose them again. But not all of them . . .

One has failed to get back, a dark-haired girl less than a foot in height.

Capturing her, though, does not solve the mystery, but deepens it. She is dressed in green, in the old country dress of Ireland, but she speaks German. Her name is Greta. She talks of *der Grosse*—the Big One—but knows nothing of her origins, or the origins of the other six—five male and one female—who have lived with her, first in the room of the dolls' houses and then, after the Big One died of a heart attack, skulking in the cellars.

But from a journal and papers Stefan has found down in the cellars, a picture emerges. The Little People are the result of German experiments, during the war, on pregnant women: The mothers were treated with drugs that inhibited growth in the foetus. The scientist responsible had been married to another of Bridget's cousins, and had escaped to Ireland, along with his human guinea-pigs, during the confusion at the end of the war.

What are they to do with them? Do they have human rights, a human destiny? Greta is persuaded to call the others from the depths of the cellar and they come, paddling across the dark waters in a toy boat they have made. They accept the giants around them, gravely but seemingly without fear. Though the problem of their origin is solved, other problems remain. There were rats in the cellar, but the Little People have killed them. How? They cannot, or will not, explain.

Although they do not seem to feel fear, they can inspire it in others. Mrs. Malone, the housekeeper, is terrified of them. Bridget, coming in from the garden in the afternoon, finds her missing, and wonders if she has fled in panic. She does not think she would have gone into the cellars, from which the Little People emerged, but feels she must check. She goes to the stairs door, opens it, and snaps on the light.

Then, rooted herself by fear and nausea, she stared down at the huddled motionless figure lying at the bottom of the stairs.

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She stifled her first impulse, which was to scream. The second—to turn and run for help—took rather more mastering. She was still uncertain of the outcome when something happened to decide her: a moan, or a groan, came up from what she had assumed was Mrs. Malone's dead body. At that, Bridget ran down the steps. She remembered, as she reached her, that one had to be careful about moving someone before one knew what, if anything was broken. Mrs. Malone lay on her side, with her legs curled up and her hands covering her face. Kneeling by her, Bridget took her hand, as gently as possible, and said:

"Tell me where it hurts."

A series of shudders, starting at her shoulders and working down to her legs, shook Mrs. Malone's body. She whispered:

"Where are they? Are they after me still? Ah, God and His Mother and His Holy Saints preserve me from them."

The possibility came to Bridget that there might be nothing physically wrong with her at all; her voice had not sounded like that of a woman with a broken leg or ruptured spleen or the like. She stood upright and, holding on to Mrs. Malone's hand, said in a brisk, peremptory tone:

"Try standing up. I'll help."

Mrs. Malone got to her feet, the other hand still covering her eyes. Bridget pryed it loose.

"You're all right. What happened? Did you slip on the stairs?"

Mrs. Malone looked fearfully up the stairs and then around her. She said:

"Are they gone, then? Are you sure they're gone?"

Now that she was reassured of her safety, it was impossible not to feel irritated. Bridget said sharply:

"Look, be reasonable. You slipped and fell. It's got nothing to do with the little people."

She grasped Bridget's arm, her fingers digging in almost painfully.

"They threw me downstairs."

"That's nonsense. They're only a foot high, and not much heavier than a cat. They couldn't throw you downstairs. You're imagining."

"I was upstairs in the passage when they came after me. They harried me, and they took my voice from me so that I could not cry out. The stairs door was open, and I made for that. And they threw me down. I heard them laughing up above, and I lay as though I was dead, and prayed."

"It's ridiculous. They don't laugh, at all. They don't even smile. I suppose you saw them, and were frightened again, and you came running for the steps and missed your footing."

Not to mention, she thought, the brandy; the stale smell of it was nauseating.

Mrs. Malone said: "They took my voice, and threw me down. Ah Jesus, preserve us all!"

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"Come on," Bridget said wearily. "Let's get you to your room. You've been shaken up badly: you need to rest."

But the little people had disappeared. This became clear by the end of the afternoon. Bridget herself was too busily engaged with doing Mrs. Malone's work as well as her own—Mrs. Malone was lying down in her room with the door locked on the inside—to bother much about this, but the others were concerned. They conducted searches, and she heard their voices, from time to time, calling through the house. When she managed a break of five minutes for a cup of tea, Daniel and Waring came to talk about it.

"She must have frightened them," Waring said.

Bridget drank her tea, feeling a little bit of herself come back into her drudge of a body.

"Mrs. Malone put it the other way round."

Daniel said: "I suppose she came across some of them in the passage—probably screamed and ran for it."

Waring shook his head. "I didn't hear anything from the lounge."

"Ran, anyway. And fell down the stairs. They saw that, and saw her lying still, apparently dead. Seamus used to whip and torture them for small offences—for nothing. They must have been frightened of what would happen."

Bridget said: "The door was shut."

"The door?"

"At the top of the stairs."

"Probably the wind blew it shut."

"There hasn't been any wind."

"A bit of breeze from time to time. It could gust enough to blow a door shut."

Could it? Bridget was chiefly aware of feeling tired. It had been a long and exhausting day, and she doubted if Mrs. Malone would be in a mood to lend any help with the dinner.

Waring said: "We must find them, and reassure them."

"They'll come back," Daniel said. "When they've got over the shock of it. It's probably wiser not to make too much of a performance of looking for them—it's more likely to prolong a state of fear."

"Do you think so?" Waring asked. "I suppose you could be right."

The five minutes were up. Reluctantly, Bridget got on her feet and headed towards the kitchen. The little people were, she supposed, important, but at the moment she would have far preferred a way of reassuring Mrs. Malone.

This she did not find, but somehow she got through the evening. She made her excuses just before ten, and took her weary way to bed. The little people still had not returned. Well, she thought, undressing, that was just too bad.

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During the day the clouds thinned and vanished; by sunset there were only a few, high and far in the west, of rose bruising to purple as the sun sank into the Atlantic. Stars began to appear, first the evening star close to the horizon and then more and more as the sky's blue deepened to indigo and at last to the black of night. Across it arched the cloud of light that was the Milky Way: the lamps of a city unimaginably vast, unimaginably remote. There was no moon, and the breeze had gone with the clouds. The earth quivered with stillness.

Out among the encircling hills, the commerce of life and death followed its customary patterns. The gravid vixen patiently enlarged a hole in a fence, wormed her way through and, with only the briefest fluttering and squawking, brought down a sleepy hen from her perch, bit through her throat and feasted on blood. A field mouse, following the scent of the female, thought itself hidden by the dark and moved carelessly over a patch of open ground; but the watching owl saw the starlit flicker of movement from a branch above, plunged, and took him. The otter by the river bank dived after the hint of a ripple in the river's still deeper blackness, and a moment later came out, shaking its head and the still living fish it held between its jaws.

It was a land and a life from which man was absent. Gentleman and farmer and labourer, housewife and child and priest, slept in their beds, within walls. The brief time of prayers and copulations and vagrant day dreams was over. A very few were still awake—a woman hating her heavy-breathing husband, a boy worrying over an examination—but exhaustion had claimed nearly all of them. Doctor and midwife slept within earshot of silent telephones. Even the poacher slept, his battered tin alarm clock set for the rising of the moon.

Within the circle of the hills stretched the bog, which at one time had been the bed of a great lake, and at another time a forest. Acre upon acre of desolation, its waters for the most part brackish, its miasma rank. But the patterns held here, too. On a patch of turf fifteen feet square, two rabbits nibbled grass, mated, and nibbled again. A mole surfaced, sniffed the dark air, and burrowed down once more in search of worms. An army of this year's frogs, newly transformed, marched over muddy ground, and a heron, planted on the edge of a small pool, waited till they were under its stilts, and dipped its beak, scooping up the tiny delicate morsels with greedy relish.

The house lay at the heart of the wilderness. Small creatures moved in the lawns and gardens, fish cruised in the lake. In the house itself, mice came out from holes

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and wainscots and fed on crumbs, vaguely aware that things were easier, now the cats and the rats had gone. For the rats had gone indeed. They had come to this place a millenium and a half ago, with the first men who settled here. For fifteen centuries, man had waged war on them, and the rats had survived. They had survived the periods of man's absence, too. Now they were gone, killed not by starvation, or poisons, or traps, but by a new, strange, subtle and deadly weapon, wielded by creatures who still did not know the nature or the extent of their powers; but who were learning. The cats, who had been their hunters, died with them. The mice lived on, undisturbed, because they posed no threat to the new masters.

In their bedrooms, men and women slept, and dreamt their ordinary dreams. Elsewhere in the house, figures, human in form though not in stature, moved silently and quickly. Sometimes they talked to each other, mouthing a guttural tongue in high liquid voices, but speech was a habit, not a necessity. They had long known what it was to share each other's thoughts, but now they were aware of other minds, of territories open, and vulnerable. This was not like the rats or the cats had been: they had no sense of danger. More from curiosity and interest than malice, they made their forays, conducted their manipulations.

XV

Bridget was very conscious of the act of waking.

There had been a dream, a confused one centered round her schooldays. The subject was not unfamiliar, and always depressing. This time it had been more so than ever; she had been on the hockey pitch, dressed in those hateful clothes, on a bitingly cold winter's morning, with twenty-two female figures screaming exhortations and encouragement around her. She had woken with the usual feeling of relief at being twenty-five and her own mistress, but with the awareness of an odd hangover —she could still hear cries in the distance. She reassured herself of her wakefulness by drinking from the tumbler of water by her bed, and listened more closely. Screams, but of pain not exuberance. She put the glass down quickly, banging it against the wood, and felt for her light switch. She pressed it, but nothing happened. Another scream, muffled and distant but very clear, scored the night's silence. It came from . . . the north wall, she realized. But that was absurd. There were no other rooms that way, only the tower.

Bewilderment and anxiety had banished the clinging heaviness of sleep. She was quite awake, and very frightened. Getting out of bed, she went to the door and tried the

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switch there. Nothing happened. A fuse gone? And the torch, which she usually kept in her bedroom, had been taken down to the kitchen last week and not brought up again. The cry of agony came again. Wasting no more time, she opened the door and began feeling her way, with what speed she could, along the landing.

Daniel did not respond when she called from the door, and she had to go over to the bed and shake him. He made a yawning inarticulate reply to that, but came awake immediately after.

"What? Who's that? Brid? Put the light on. What is it?"

"The lights aren't working. A fuse must have blown."

"Well, it can wait till morning, can't it? You didn't wake me for that, surely." His hand probed, caught her shoulder, bare but for the nightdress strap, and rapidly moved down to her breast. He made an appreciative noise. "Mm. Come on into bed where we can talk."

"No. Listen, Daniel. I'm frightened. I can hear someone screaming."

"Screaming? I can't hear anyone."

"Nor can I, here. But I could in my room. It seemed to be coming from the tower."

"But there's no one in there."

"I know."

"And the walls are feet thick."

"It came from that direction, all the same."

"You've been having a nightmare." His hand tightened its hold. "Come on in and get cozy."

"I wasn't dreaming. I know I wasn't." She tried to steady her voice, which was trembling with the recollection. "Come with me, and listen. Please."

Daniel said, with amiable resignation: "O.K. Hang on while I grub for my slippers. I suppose one bed is as good as another. I take it I'll be allowed to stay for a little while, in case the voices come back?"

She was shivering, more violently than when she had heard the screams.

"Hurry," she said. "Please hurry, darling."

They walked hand in hand, with Bridget feeling the wall with her free hand. The landing was pitch black and, apart from their own footfalls, silent. They reached her room and stopped just inside the door.

"Not a thing," Daniel said. "Or are your ears keener than mine?"

She listened, straining. The silence was supreme and inviolate. Generally the wind made some noise, rattling the warped window frames, or howling, loud or soft, along the eaves or through the interstices of the tower. Tonight there was complete stillness.

"Nothing now," she said. "But I did hear it. I wasn't asleep."

"Well, there's a simple solution." He tightened his hand, and

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moved towards her bed, taking her with him. "We'll lie down and wait for it to happen again. There ought to be some way of passing the time. Pity it's so dark. You don't have a luminous pocket chess set, by any chance?"

She allowed herself to be taken to bed, and Daniel got in with her. The shivering returned, even more violently, as he put his arms round her. He said:

"You really are upset. It must have been a shocker."

"I *was* dreaming before, but quite an ordinary dream. But I was awake, standing over by the door, when I heard the screams. Honestly."

"Delayed effect." His hand stroked her body, gently and reassuringly. "I knew a chap at school who used to dream the wall was opening up, and monsters were coming through to get him. He used to wake screaming, and someone would put the light on, and he'd be sitting up in bed with his hands over his eyes. When you'd dragged his hands away, and made him look, he still swore he could see them. Scaly things, he said they were, with large black teeth."

Was it possible? An hallucination of some kind? The memory was still vivid, but Daniel's hand, his lips on her throat, moving down to her breast, were the nearer reality, overlaying and blotting out the other. The deep sense of fear remained, but the warmth and strength of Daniel's body against hers was a shield protecting her. She felt a wild gratitude for that. Holding his head with her hands, she pressed him to her. He mumbled against her:

"Sorry about the nightmare, but I'm really very glad you came along and woke me. You must do it more often—the waking, not the dreaming."

She whispered: "Yes."

"Better now?"

"Much better."

It cut through their warmth and ease like a knife, small but sharp and diamond-hard. Gasping, she felt his body stiffen as he heard it, too. It was the same cry, but even more desperate with pain.

Waring was wakened by Helen. Her bedside light was on, and she was standing over him, shaking him. He blinked up at her.

"What's the matter?"

"You were snoring."

"You woke me to tell me that?"

"It woke me up in the first place."

He sat up and glared at her. "I've got a cold coming. How can I help that, for Christ's sake? I've put up with you snoring often enough."

"You could have helped it by choosing a country with a decent climate to take a vacation in."

"Ah, for God's sake!"

"It's all right for you. You never get bad colds. With my sinuses, I

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suffer hell for weeks, months sometimes."

"Your damn sinuses are psychosomatic; you live for them. If you could get your mind off yourself for an hour or so, you wouldn't have them. Hour? I should have said minute or so."

"Listen," she said. "We're leaving. Tomorrow."

Waring realized she meant it. He stared at her.

"What about the little people?"

"They've gone, and I don't give a damn if they come back or not."

"Well, I do."

"Sure." She laughed. "Daniel told me about that chat you and he had. I hit that nail right on the button, didn't I? Who is it you're planning to bring in? Matthews? No, I guess not. Someone bigger than that. A real eagle to carry the little wren way way up into the sky. You know what? I think you've admitted it to yourself at last."

"Admitted what?"

"That you're a failure. You're not concealing the conniving from yourself any more, not even trying to. You're just as much a failure in your work as you are as a human being. And by God that's failure, all right."

She had gone back to her own bed, and sat down. The taunting voice came from a hazy face, the features blurred and indistinct. Waring found his spectacles, and she came hatefully into focus.

"I'm not a failure," he said, "in anyone's eyes but yours. You want to be married to a big success, don't you? But not the kind of success that's based on any sort of merit. It just needs to be a big enough shine to reflect on you. And the funny thing is you don't know how goddamn ludicrous you are when the spotlight's on you. You have no grace at the best of times, but social functions bring out the worst in you. You talk too much, and too loud, and however much powder you put on, your face gets covered in sweat, and everybody—*everybody*—who's standing there smiling politely is laughing like hell inside—and openly the minute your back's turned. The only hope for you is to lead a quiet life. You don't look quite so ridiculous that way."

It had gone home; he had hit her where it hurt. He saw the lines tighten round her eyes and braced himself for her throwing herself at him, a fat soft mass but armed with nails, not to mention teeth. But she controlled herself. She said, quite softly:

"You stinking bastard. All I have to say to you is that we're going tomorrow. You heard that? We're leaving tomorrow."

Waring found himself a cigarette and lit it. He did not offer one to Helen. She came over and helped herself, and he was ready for her to attack him again, but she did not. He said:

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"Wanting to be the Big Chief's Lady is only part of it, isn't it? The other and more important part is that you have to knock down everything and everyone round you, because you're so lousy jealous. This is a break for me, a big break. I admit that. In this world, you need hard work and ability, and you also need luck, even as an academic. Well, this is where the little white ball clicks into my slot, and you know it, and you're determined to foul it up if you can. So that's why you want to get me out of here. Isn't that right?"

"You're too little to understand," she said. "Little people? There couldn't be anything smaller than you."

"Which means I am right."

"No." She stubbed out the cigarette, from which she had taken no more than a couple of draws. "You won't understand, but I'll tell you. The little people—that footprint, the hole in the wall, the candle and the candy wrapping in the tower . . . those were signs, signs of wonders. You laughed at the whole thing, which shows how small you are because it was like Columbus' men seeing land birds and knowing that a new world was just over the horizon. Then we found them, the wonder was a reality, and what did it mean to you? It meant a soft option, no more than that. You said it yourself: the little white ball clicking into your slot. That's what it means to you, and that's why you disgust me utterly. And why we're leaving in the morning."

"You, if you like. Not me."

"Stay then," she said indifferently. "I said we're leaving. Cherry and I. You do just what you want."

"Cherry." Waring picked a flake of tobacco from his lip. "The same old blackmail. Only this time it isn't going to work. Cherry won't go with you."

"You think she'll stay with you?"

"Yes. But not because of me. Because of Mat."

"That doesn't mean anything."

"Doesn't it?" He grinned at her. "Then try it out."

She was unsure. "It couldn't be serious. She couldn't have any real interest in a man like that."

"Couldn't she? You'd know better if you could get your eyes off that imaginary mirror you carry around with you."

"A boozing Puritan. And if he knew about her—if he had any idea—he'd run a mile. A mile? He wouldn't stop this side of Dublin."

Her voice had regained confidence. Waring stared at her with bitter hatred. He said:

"My God, I believe you would!"

"Would what?"

"You'd tell him about her, to break things up. You'd betray her, the way you've betrayed me. You bloody heartless bitch."

"You swine!"

She had frozen with anger.

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Their gazes held in mutual recognition of detestation and contempt. And it was at this point, in the concentration of pure hostility, that it happened. There was a brief spasm of dizziness, and he was not looking at her any longer, or rather, not just at her. His disembodied vision was above them both, looking down from somewhere near the ceiling. And this was real immobility, the view fixed, unwinking, unchanging and unchangeable. As he watched, the figures beneath him broke their silence. His own voice, and then hers, in a babble of vituperation that went on and on. He was as unable to avoid listening as to avoid looking. There were no eyes to close, no ears to shut. The two creatures, one of whom he knew with horror to be himself, went on savaging each other with words. He tried desperately to will himself back into his flesh, but it was no good.

And he became aware of something else, which intensified the horror. It was not through any of the senses, but he was conscious of a near presence, a fellow spectator, trapped as he was. It was Helen. He tried to call to her, but there was no way of calling. Beneath them both the puppet show continued. The voices were shouting now.

Stefan lay awake for some time watching the window and the three stars, one bright and two dim, framed by it. Only gradually did he realize that Hanni's even breathing was not the breathing of sleep, that she was awake, too. He called to her softly, and she answered him.

"Can't you sleep?" he asked.

"I'm not tired." She paused. "Don't worry. I am not being unhappy."

He put the light on, and looked across to her. She lay on her side, her face towards him but buried in the pillow. Her right eye watched him under the cloud of dark hair. It was so small a distance between them. He had an impulse to bridge it, to go to her, touch her, take her, comfort her and be comforted. But he could not. Small as the distance was, it held all the past in it.

He said: "Shall we have some music?"

"If you like."

"Since we are both awake." He reached for the Grundig and switched it on. "There will be no Irish stations at this time."

Moving the dial, he first found a French station giving a news bulletin—something to do with farm prices—and then a station broadcasting Bach: a sonata for violin and 'cello. He remembered another occasion, and wondered if Hanni did, too. As though reading his thoughts, she said:

"Do you think they still play it together? I suppose not. They are no longer alive, perhaps."

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It had been the first holiday after they were married. He had managed to afford a week in Switzerland. They had stayed *en pension* at a chalet in Canton Freiburg, a chalet standing near a river in the middle of a broad valley in which even nature seemed to bask in Swiss prosperity—there was so much grass and leaf, and all orderly and in good heart. Every day the sun had shone as they had walked through the valley—together, he remembered—or climbed the wooded hills to see the Alps beyond. And in the evening there had been a richness and abundance of food unbelievable after post-war Germany. Then coffee, good strong coffee with cream, and sitting out on the verandah, listening to the music as the valley filled with shadow. Defour, the proprietor, had been the 'cellist, his wife, Trudli, had played the violin. They were both in their late fifties. Hanni was right—they would most likely be dead by now. Too old, at any rate, to make music.

There had been such joy there, such peace. The sun had burned up doubts to a dry ash, which the snow-cooled breeze from the great southern peaks had blown away, to be lost in the wide bright skies of this peaceful land. There again, for that space, he had known he was loved, and trusted the knowledge. Or thought he had known. Because the doubts fastened on him once more as they went north, and seemed to bite deeper for their brief absence.

Yet the assurance and contentment had been real, and lived again in the music. This was a bridge, which he could use if he had the courage. Go to her, take her hand . . . The music stopped.

It was the end of the sonata. The announcer identified it, in German. There was a silence, followed by more music. But not Bach. He listened, incredulous, trying to make sense of what he was hearing. It was not possible. But those chords, that stridency, were unmistakeable, unforgettable. The notes marching like Storm Troopers. . . . He wanted to turn it off, but could not, and did not know if the paralysis which gripped him was of the body or the will. And there was fascination also. The voices—surely they would not come, too. But they did, bellowing with the old military precision and unison.

Die Fahne hoch,
Die Reihe dicht geschlossen,
Marschieren auf, mit ruhig' festigem Schritt . . .

He looked at Hanni and saw her face, frozen with fear; yet still could not move to end it.

Kameraden die Rotfront und Reaktion erschossen
Marschieren im Geist in unseren Reihen mit!

"No," he heard her whisper. "Oh, no."

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A joke, he wondered, an unbelievably bad joke? What else? But how was it possible? The music crashed to an end, and he waited. What could they say?

The announcer spoke again: *"Hier ist Deutschland, hier ist Berlin."* The tone was sharp, portentous. *"Jetzt bringen wir—unser Fuehrer!"*

He broke through the paralysis then, reached out to the radio and slammed it to the floor. But it did not stop them hearing that other voice, harsh and unlovely, and indelible in the minds of those who had heard it, more than twenty years ago. Hanni was weeping, and the voice went on.

Mat woke to find her sitting on the bed watching him with grave eyes. He smiled up at her.

"Couldn't sleep again?"

Cherry nodded. "I like looking at you when you're asleep."

"I like looking at you at any time."

"I do, too. I mean . . . You know. I wasn't going to wake you. Just sit by you for a while and look at you."

"How long have you been here?"

"A few minutes. Five, maybe. You didn't wake when I put the light on, so I thought you weren't going to. If you're tired, I'll go."

"No, I'm not tired."

"I didn't come straight here. I went downstairs first. I was looking for them."

"The little people?"

She nodded. "But no sign. I called Greta, but nothing happened. Do you think they'll come back?"

"I don't know."

"You don't want them to come back, do you?"

"No."

"Why is that?"

He said slowly: "It's hard to explain."

"Because you think they'll be exploited?"

He started telling her, hesitantly at first and then more confidently, about his grandparents. Everything: the feeling of peace and security, the special warmth when his grandfather went to the races, and the stories of the little people that his grandmother told him then, and so at last the culmination of savage ugliness. It was something he had never talked about, nor thought he ever could, but the telling was not only easy but, in a strange way, nourishing. The small buds of bitterness, all these years folded and clenched, uncurled into blossoms—black, ragged, but capable of being looked at. It was her innocence, he thought, that did it, her lovely innocence.

When he had finished, she nodded. For a time they remained, at ease, in a companionable silence. Her hand had come towards his, and he had taken it, covering it and holding it on the sheet.

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"I know what you mean," she said. "I used to vacation in the summer, too. I mean, to a real home. It was my uncle and aunt, and there were these cousins. Four of them, sort of in two batches. When I was eight, there was a boy eleven and a girl ten, and then another boy and girl six and five. My uncle was a medical doctor, and they lived on Long Island, about fifty miles from New York. They had this big old house, and three dogs and a gang of cats, and a pony and rabbits and half a dozen hens that were kind of pets, and the beach was less than a mile away."

He smiled at her. "That sounds good."

"Was, too. But it wasn't the animals, or the beach or anything. It was just that it all seemed so happy. Meals were a riot—they all had this crazy sense of humour, and one of them would say something and they'd all take it up, even the little ones, and all round the house all day you'd hear them singing—a lot of those completely screwy songs with crazy words and tunes mixed up. They were so happy with each other. Of course, the kids used to fight sometimes, but that never lasted long. And there was no question of the big ones against the little ones, or girls against boys—that sort of thing. They all went together, and when I was there, I fitted into the middle of them, and they treated me like one of themselves, and so did my uncle and aunt. I used to lie awake with excitement for a week before it was time for me to go there."

She was silent, remembering. Mat asked:

"What happened?"

She nodded. "Something always has to happen, doesn't it? Only it's not like yours—nobody died. They're all alive though I haven't seen any of them for years. What happened was, my uncle and aunt got divorced. They sold the house and moved different ways, and he took the two bigger ones and she took the others. I don't know what they did about the pony, and the dogs and cats and hens and rabbits. They both married again, and they've both got children—she's got one and he's got two. They're all very happy, probably."

"You needed it too badly."

"Like you."

She gave a small shiver, and he asker her: "Cold?"

"Not exactly. It's just . . ."

She broke off. The house was somehow rocking underneath them, swinging along an axis in progressively wider arcs. And yet silently: nothing crashed to the ground, there was no rattle or reverberation.

She said: "What is it?"

"I don't know." He tightened his hold on her hand. "An earthquake, maybe. But a strange one. Maybe we ought to try to get outside, into the open."

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"No." She gave a quick shake of her head. "Let's stay."

"Then let me hold you."

She nodded, smiling. She came to him, and he opened the sheets for her, and she slipped her small slim body into the bed. Her right arm burrowed under his waist and the left came round to join it, so that she held him tight, and pressed her body against his. And he felt the leap of desire, with no shame or disgust, only joy and an awareness of peace. His hands felt for her, learning her with love.

The wild incredible seesawing went on. Over the curve of her shoulder he saw that a picture, a painting of an Alpine scene, clung unmoving to the wall. Incredible, and absurd. Her face moved up to his, the warm lips pressed and opened. Let the world end.

Bridget said: "There! You heard it."

He was still tingling from its impact on the senses: a cry so small and distant but capable of electrifying, it seemed, all the nerves in his flesh. With what? Shock only? No, something more than that. He waited intently for it to come again. An animal outside, perhaps, a rabbit caught in a snare. Their cries were supposed to be almost human. The moments passed. Bridget said:

"You did hear it. I felt you jump."

Her breath was on his throat. He was conscious of her body again, but very differently. This was not an accomplice, but a fellow witness, neutral, possibly even hostile. He said:

"I heard it. I don't know what it was, though."

"Someone hurt and in pain."

"I'm not sure. It could be an animal, outside."

"You know it isn't."

"Listen, then. One cry like that doesn't tell you anything. If it comes again . . ."

"Can't we do something?"

"There isn't much we can do until we have some idea what it is and where it's coming from."

"I've told you, from inside the tower. I listened at the wall."

He wanted time to think, time to make some kind of sense of it. A cry of pain, if it had been of pain, and from the tower, if Bridget's assurance were to be trusted. So many uncertainties, and the conclusion one that only posed further and still more baffling problems. Her persistence irritated him. He said:

"Wait and listen. I wasn't ready for it."

"But they're hurt now!"

Daniel put a hand over her mouth, only half playfully. She tensed against him, and then relaxed, acquiescing. They lay together, as close as lovers but in no communion. In part, he was hoping that the cry would not come again, that the silence would

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stretch into the ordinary silence of night and that chill sound fade from the memory. But he was waiting also, in a tension that nagged more and more rawly, for a resolution.

There was a series of cries this time, and there was no mistaking that they were human, and an appeal. Words could be sensed before they were articulate. His heart pounded and he found himself shivering, as Bridget had done. She lay very quiet, holding him, offering the comfort that he had thought to give her. But although he felt the weight of her breasts, the pressure of thigh and knee, he could not reach out far enough to take it. The far voice shrieked, and after that the words were clear enough to make out:

"Mary, Mother of God, help me!"

The words, and also the identity of the one who had spoken them. Bridget said:

"It's Mrs. Malone."

"It can't be."

"It is." She disengaged from him, and he felt her getting out of bed in the dark. "We must go and do something for her."

Daniel got out himself. He was shivering still, so violently that he was not entirely confident that his legs would bear him. He said:

"Where are you? Put your hand out."

They linked hands, and that was a little better. The cry came again, formless but plainly from the direction Bridget had told him. How could she be in the tower? He said:

"It's an illusion. She's in her room, having a nightmare, and the sound is being carried round the house. A sort of echo effect."

"Do you think it could be? We can go and see."

"Which is her room?"

"Just on the other side of the landing."

The cries had stopped. They felt their way out, and to the door. Bridget knocked, and there was no reply. She pushed it open, and called:

"Mrs. Malone? Are you all right?"

There was no reply. Daniel could see the bed, near the starry dark of the window. It looked empty. Bridget led the way, and he followed. The bed was empty.

He felt, paradoxically, a great relief, because at that instant a solution occurred to him. Granted that it was Mrs. Malone who was crying out, and that she was in the tower, there could still be a rational and only moderately unnerving explanation. She had been badly shocked by the little people, quite possibly into temporary insanity. There could have been some sort of dual mind thing working, like the woman he had read about who had two personalities that were not only separate but hated each other, so that one of them,

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knowing the other was desperately afraid of spiders, would use a period of temporary dominance to send herself a box of spiders through the mail. Perhaps one Mrs. Malone had gone through to the tower, looking for the little people, and the other had suddenly found herself there, alone and in the dark. Or simpler still—she could be a sleep-walker.

He outlined this rapidly to Bridget, who listened, and said:

"Whatever it is, we'd better go and get her."

"Of course." It was the darkness that undermined one. Why did the bloody fuses have to choose this night to blow? "There's a torch downstairs?"

"Yes."

"Well, if we can get hold of that, we'll have a better idea of what we're up to."

They heard the voice again, as they came out onto the landing, faint, at the other end of a bad telephone line, but intelligible.

"Ah, no . . . Don't . . . Don't do that to me, for God's sake!"

The impulses, from nerve ends to brain, and so to nerves again. This time he was forced to recognize it in himself for what it was. Shock, but more than that. Fear.

The terrible thing was that it was not a dream. Helen had a trick of getting herself out of bad dreams. She could always recognize them for what they were, and if they were really bad she could shout and wake herself up. Generally she woke up Waring as well, and he cursed about it, but the important thing was getting clear. She had had bad nightmares as a child, of old men with grasping hands and herself trying to run away and her legs getting heavier and slower all the time, but nothing like that since she had learned the knack of freeing herself. She was generally conscious of the good ones as dreams, too, and did her best to prolong them, though with less success.

But this was altogether different. This was real powerlessness, a sense of complete helplessness and futility though without danger. She was watching the past, and the scenes and people had the iron edge of reality; only she herself was insubstantial and formless.

It was the night of the Club Ball, the last one out there. She knew that because she could see the Townshends dancing together, and they only arrived the year she left. Her younger self was dancing with Pete Stryski who, she remembered, had brought her. It was a shock, and not altogether a pleasant one, to realize how pretty she had been—maybe just a slight heaviness of chin, but faultless otherwise. And a hundred and thirty pounds, give or take five.

Knowing that she was there, and seeing it, she looked first for

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her father, and was lost in a spasm of love and anger. He was with Maisie Dewar, not dancing but talking to her in a low voice over drinks. She had known for years before that he was an indiscriminate lecher, but the reality could still surprise her. How could he talk to, look at, touch a woman like that? In three years the talking and looking and touching would be over, finished forever for him; and Maisie would be in the beginnings of agony from the cancer that was to kill her within four. But she could still feel fury for this scene, this moment.

And Waring? Getting a drink for the Hogan girl. He was handsome, too, she admitted—probably the most handsome man in the place, as she herself was the prettiest girl. A splendid pair, but not at this moment. There had been that terrible row the week before, when she had thrown the engagement ring off the verandah, and laughed at him as he grubbed for it in the dirt. That was why she was with Pete, who had been glad enough to pick up where Waring had interrupted him. She looked at the slim dancing figure, and found there was another dimension to this reality: she could be her, as well as watch her. But as a spectator still—she could read that alien mind, but could not alter it even in one tiny random thought.

She was talking to Peter now, laughing up at him as she danced, and giving him altogether about twenty per cent of her attention. The rest was concentrated on the covert angry search for Waring. Doing that, she saw her father with Maisie, and covered the swiftly boiling resentment with a darting smile to Pete. He looked pleased and flustered, and missed his step. She did not chide him as she usually did, but laughed and squeezed his hand.

It was about ten minutes later that she got her father alone. There was no sign of Maisie—most likely she had gone to the john—and he was standing with his back to a pillar by one of the big palms, with a small self-satisfied smile on his face that made her want to hit him. She said:

"Hi, Pop. How's it going?"

"Not bad. You look pretty tonight, lollipop."

"Thanks. You don't look so bad yourself, for an old man."

"Hey, a compliment from my beautiful daughter! I should buy you a drink for that. What'll it be?"

"Nothing." She looked at him, smiling still but letting the steel show. "There's only one thing that gives you away."

The smug expression changed to one of slight wariness. "What's that, then?"

"The quality of the women you go for. I see you're in the Maisie

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Dewar league now. That qualifies you as old, as well as dirty. Who comes next—Lucy Steele? I hear she's pretty good with jaded appetites in the senile."

She saw his face tighten as she spoke, and knew she had got him on the raw. Lucy Steele was in her sixties, blousy but indefatigable. When her first husband had died, the year he was due for retirement, she had married old Steele, the British Vice-Consul, following, it was said, a slow but relentless rape, and had then resumed her former promiscuity. With a good deal of difficulty recently: her wickedness had lost charm and the seesaw had tilted.

He did not, as she expected, lash back. Instead, he said:

"I see you're with Pete tonight. Had some trouble with Waring?"

"You look after your affairs," she said. "I'll see to mine."

"Sure. Sure, you will. I can give you some advice, though. As a father, as well as an old man."

His voice was mild, but she watched him in suspicious silence. He went on:

"I think you should stick to Pete. He's a good boy. Intelligent, good-looking, great future with the company. Above all, though, he's sweet natured. Of course, he'll work out, as soon as he's managed to lift his attention higher than your mons Veneris, that he's married a shrew, but he won't turn nasty. Eventually, he'll probably take a little girl on the side, but he'll pick someone in contrast to you—someone nice and straight and soft-hearted—so she'll stand no chance of taking him away from you. You'll keep him until you've picked the flesh from his bones."

He pulled a long thin leaf from the palm, and pointed it at her like a rapier.

"Whereas if you were to marry Waring, you'd be getting someone who could be as mean and nasty as you are, and with a little encouragement from you, will be. Lollipop, I see a long life of murderous in-fighting ahead of you, in that case. Of course, you might break up quite soon, but I don't know. You're both looking for something to hate, and you'll have each other. Think of me, on your golden wedding anniversary."

He made a duelling gesture with the leaf, smiled, and left before she could get in a riposte. She was tempted to go after him, but Maisie was heading towards him, too, and she could well imagine what Maisie would make of the fracas that was likely to follow. Having spent years polishing up the image of the dutiful only daughter, she was not going to spoil it now.

But Waring was standing nearby, and alone. Going to him, she said:

"We've got to talk."

His look showed resentment,

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but unwilling fascination as well. Saying "Please," she hunched her shoulders slightly forward. The front of her dress would drop with that movement; only a fraction of an inch, but it brought his eye down.

He asked: "Now?"

"Yes, now. Ann will be all right. I won't keep you from her long."

The night air was cool after the crowded dance floor. She led him to her father's Buick in among the mass of parked cars. They walked in silence, a foot or two apart. When they reached it, he opened the door, and she got in. He went round to the other side and got in himself, behind the wheel. She looked out through the windscreen at the heavy brilliant stars, the gaudy moon. She said:

"I'm sorry about last week."

There was a very small pause, before he said: "So am I." She went on staring ahead. The night sky had fascinated her as a child, and did so still. All that immensity, for nothing. He said: "Look at me. Look at me, Helen."

Her face turned to his. The watching Helen behind the Helen that framed the tremulous smile saw the other familiar face, close and coming closer. Two masks, approaching to touch, masks of earnest love with deceit and selfishness and anger behind them.

Helen whispered: "What about Ann? I promised not to keep you."

"Ann? Who is Ann, anyway?" Touching, meeting, sucking at each other. "I love you, Helen."

"I love you."

Thanks for the advice, Pop. And now it's like this, within five minutes, and on the front seat of your own car. It hurt her more than she expected, but there was a bitter triumph in the pain.

Although she did not understand how she got there, Hanni knew the place right away.

She had gone there once, when Stefan was away for a fortnight, seeing to the opening of the shop in Frankfurt. She had gone by train and then, from the station, there had been a bus. There were only half a dozen people in it, all foreigners, she thought, except herself, and they had to wait for the driver to come out of the Gasthof across the road. He came, wiping a broad hand across a fleshy mouth, and stared at them all before getting into the driver's seat. She thought his gaze lingered on her, but told herself that was silly. The time of that sort of looking was over, and he could not see the small bunch of flowers, wrapped in tissue paper inside her bag.

The drive, across flat country parched with the heat of a dry summer, seemed endless. The other passengers—the French couple and the four Americans, a man and wife in their fifties and two women rather older—whispered

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together, their voices a meaningless accompaniment to the noise of the engine. She wished they would talk normally, not as though they were at the funeral of someone they thought they ought to respect.

At last they arrived and the driver, picking his teeth, looked them over reflectively as they got down. The fences stretched away, with rough grass round them and the high wooden towers set at the corners. Right ahead, the gates stood open, as they had done for seven years, with the old derisive lettering still there above the entrance. And yet, it touched her heart with an ache of love. They had seen it, she thought, as she went forward herself. Where my eyes rest, theirs rested for an instant, all those long years ago.

It was the only place at which she felt contact. She went inside and trailed round with the others, but it meant nothing. Even the shower rooms and the ovens meant nothing. This was just a place like any other. They were not here, and their spirits would not linger in this barren ugliness. She could not find anywhere to lay her flowers, and brought them back to the front gate with her. There she put them down, and straightened up to see the driver looking at her. She walked to the bus under his scrutiny, and he stood aside, his expression blank. The two American women were coming back, as well.

"You just can't imagine it, can you?" one of them was saying. "You can't picture it."

But now there was no question of imagining and picturing. This was how it had been, and she was there, amongst it. She stood in line for roll-call with the others in the cold wintry dawn, and heard their voices answer as the names were read. She did not hear her own; perhaps it had been called already. And a woman in uniform moved along the ranks, counting. She was a thin, gaunt woman, at first sight as starved-looking as the others. But the gauntness was not that of lack of food: her face for a moment stared into Hanni's, bleak and strong, consumed by its own hatred and contempt. In the line in front, a figure was being supported by those on either side of her. The guard came to her, stared, and then jabbed suddenly with the stick she was carrying, and the figure collapsed onto the frozen ground. The guard moved on in silence, and the figure stayed where it had fallen. She was dead, Hanni saw, the eyes staring sightlessly up at the dark heavens.

After, there was another lining up for breakfast, for the hot water soup and the small square of grey bread, and then a short space of time before they would parade again for the day's work parties. She used it in searching for the faces she remembered from childhood—Tante Miriam, Tante Sar-

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ah, Tante Eva, Evchen and Ruth and Sophie and Esther. They would be changed, skin drawn tight over bone like all these round her, but she knew she would recognize them. A face cannot change to deceive the eye of love.

She searched frantically, aware of the shortness of time, of the impossibility of checking every face in this shifting cloud of anonymity. It must be for that she was here—what else? To see them, if only one, if only for a moment: what other need could have brought her back, through space and time, to this desert of life-in-death? A tall stooped figure from a distance looked like Tante Sarah —she remembered her standing just like that at the time of Benni's Bar Mitzvah—and she raced towards her, but the woman turned and was a stranger.

The wind howled through the wires and between the huts. Hanni held her hands together in front of her, pressing them for warmth against her breast. She was cold, like the others, and, she knew now, emaciated as they were; she felt her own ribs under the thin cloth. Perhaps she had been wrong. Perhaps it was not to find them but to be with them, to suffer here and die here, even though for them it had been last month, or next month. She did not mind that. Except for . . .

Remembering him, as sometimes she remembered him on waking, after a bad dream, she felt a great lift of gladness. Not that anything changed about her: this, however it had happened, was no dream. But thinking of him she knew, with an unswerving certainty, that he was here, somewhere in the camp with her. He was here, and she could find him. In the men's camp? She ran towards the wires. There was a no-mansland between the two enclosures, but at least she could look through at him, see him smile.

He saw her at the moment she saw him. They went towards each other, with the two lots of wires between them, and she knew that he had only just come here, that her need had drawn him to her. He looked happy at last, and his happiness halted her. Because it meant that he still did not know what he was, or what uniform he was wearing.

She saw him read the horror in her eyes, and then look down at himself, with a terrible despair.

The house had stopped rocking by the time she drifted up from sleep. The only sound was Mat's breathing and her own, comically out of phase. Her right arm had woken her. It was under him, and the weight of his body, pressing on it, had numbed it. She opened her eyes, saw that he was awake and looking at her, and wriggled it free.

"You've been asleep," he said.

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"I know. Long?"

"Not long."

She massaged her arm. "Pins and needles. Apart from that, I feel good. In fact, I feel tremendous."

"I've been working something out."

"What's that?"

"I may have fifty years in front of me. That's seventeen thousand, two hundred and fifty days and nights. It's a lot of nights to look forward to."

"You don't have to say that." He looked puzzled, and she smiled. "What about nights off for illness?"

"Say fifty. It still leaves seventeen thousand, two hundred."

"I guess we're both pretty fit. Do you mean it?"

"Mean what?"

"That you want to marry me?"

"What else?"

She put her fingers up to his ear, and pulled at the lobe gently for emphasis.

"Well, what people are going to *say* is that the whole thing is *crazy*, we hardly *know* each other, we come from different *back*grounds, different *countries* even, so that it's nothing but an *infatuation*, the effect of sex on a couple of *simple minds*. That's what they're going to say."

"Does it matter what anyone says?"

She stared at his strange and yet familiar face. What was so different was being able to look at him now with love and trust and hope. She saw his innocence, his complex simplicity, and felt the weight of what she had to tell him. But it did not crush her, and it never occurred to her for a moment to keep silent. She said:

"I'm not the first, am I?"

"No."

"How many?"

He answered her simply: "Two." He hesitated. "One of them was a prostitute."

"Five boys had me in one evening."

His face did not show horror, but bewilderment, and then the beginnings of anger. But not against her. He said:

"You mean . . ."

"No, not rape. I went with them willingly. Statutory rape, I guess. I was fifteen."

He said: "Tell me."

She understood what he meant. There was humbleness in the demand, and faith. She said:

"I don't know that I can explain it. Maybe the analyst could. They had me go to an analyst, and I was pretty impressed at first, he talked kind of like God, and then one hot afternoon I went in there with the top buttons of my blouse undone, and I could see him sitting there wanting to tear it right open, and the terrible thing was knowing why he didn't—not to protect me, but to protect himself, and the money and professional reputa-

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tion and all that. After that, it wasn't a lot of use going on. He wrote me off as uncooperative."

He had not shrunk from her, and now took the hand that had been up against his chest and held it in his own. She said:

"It's been happening for three years. They wanted me, and I wanted them to want me, and once they knew . . . They just don't leave you alone then. I went to summer camp, but so did one of the boys from school, and he told others, and in the end I was the scandal of the year and they sent me home. That's when my parents knew about it. And when school started it was worse than ever, naturally. So this year they brought me here with them, for a quiet vacation. Where they could keep an eye on me."

He said: "But this is not the same."

"You know that? Nothing like. This was the first time, the very first."

"I know."

She saw the lights first in reflection on the wall—brightness and shadow leaping in a strange dance. He said: "Look at the window," and she turned, though reluctant to take her eyes from his face. The sky was alive and moving with brilliance, flashing and writhing in greens and blues and pinks. She said, with no more fear than when the house had rocked:

"What is it?"

"I don't know. The Northern Lights? I've never seen anything like it."

She said contentedly: "Quite a night."

They watched in silence for a time. Then Mat said:

"It must be pretty fine outside."

"Shall we go look? Get dressed?"

"Dressing gowns and slippers."

"O.K."

They went out quietly, but there was no sign of anyone else stirring in the top part of the house. They did not switch lights on; enough brightness came in from outside. From the stairs, St. George in stained glass killed an iridiscent dragon, himself shifting through strange hues. From the hall, Cherry looked up the stairs again, and caught Mat's arm.

"They're back."

The little people stood at the top, staring down at them. She could see both the women, and at least three of the men. She waved, and they gazed down without moving. She said:

"Perhaps the rocking frightened them. Or the lights. It's funny no one else is awake. Don't you think so?"

"I'm glad they're not."

She hugged his arm. "So am I."

They went out into the night. The air was warm, and the sky was full of angels.

Bridget said: "We'd better get a move on. Sleep-walking or dual

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personality or whatever it is, she's in bad trouble. Let's go and find her."

"No."

Although he was standing beside her, she could only dimly see him, could not read his face. His hand gripped her arm with a strength that surprised her. She said:

"Why not?"

"I need to think."

"What about? She's in pain, even if she is only imagining it."

"That last cry—'Don't do that to me'—it was directed at someone."

"Well?"

"The earlier one was a general cry for help. Someone in distress—finding herself alone in the dark, perhaps. But this time she was speaking to someone. Who?"

"Does it matter? As you said, imagining things."

"I'm not sure."

"Whether it's imaginary or not, the obvious thing is to go and help her."

"The obvious thing isn't always the best." He sounded angry in the dark, and it shook her confidence. Men, after all, were much better at this sort of thing, surely. He said: "If she's in real danger, it's important to think matters out first."

Bridget said: "I still don't see . . ."

"The little people. She told you earlier that they harried her, threw her down the steps. We didn't believe her. What if it were true?"

"But how could they? They're so small and helpless."

"I don't know. I don't *know*. But there's something very odd about them."

"And why should they?"

"That's easier to grasp. Look, they went to earth when Seamus died. Then we caught Greta, and the next day the rest came out. I suppose they had realized that all human beings were not the same, that there was nothing to fear from us."

"And there wasn't."

"No. But remember their conditioning. Laboratory animals to Hofricht, toys to your degenerate cousin. Toys to titillate him, and toys to be tormented. The whippings, the tortures—all that. Master and slaves, with the slaves fearing the master. So what happens when the master dies, and the slaves are free, and then they find creatures like the master but without, as they see it, the master's brutality and strength?"

"You're saying they would torture Mrs. Malone—to get their own back for what happened to them?"

"Mrs. Malone in the first place, because probably they sensed her fear. But once they've acquired the taste for it . . ."

"I can't believe it. Greta?"

"Yes, Greta." His voice carried a ring of utter conviction. "Greta is-

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n't at all what she seems. She's been conditioned, as they all have. They are not human. You have to remember that. It isn't just a matter of size. Being human means being raised as human, with human values. They were not."

"But even if one grants that—I mean, they *are* so small. How could they be a danger?"

"I wish I knew. But I would prefer to have some sort of weapon before getting ready to tackle them. They're small, and they move fast. Bigger than rats, and infinitely more dangerous, because intelligent."

She said slowly: "There's an old gun downstairs, but no cartridges."

"It would make a club. Though there might be something better in the kitchen."

The cry came again, inarticulate, pitched higher and higher until it was a wail of agony. Bridget said:

"We mustn't wait any longer. God knows what they're doing to her."

"How did they get her there?" Daniel said. "They couldn't carry her."

"Never mind that."

She groped her way to the door, and he followed her. The darkness on the landing, without the starlight from the window, was even more impenetrable. They felt their way along towards the head of the stairs. Stopping there, Bridget was aware of his rapid breathing, the beating of his heart near her own. Something, impalpable but real, came to her from him. It communicated as love communicates, a sensing without senses. But it was not love: it was fear.

Her nerves crawled with the consciousness of it. It was biting into her own mind as, she knew, it dominated his. She had to be free of him. Action was as necessary as breathing. She started running forward, down the stairs in the dark, and heard him call her but paid no heed. She had passed the turn in the stairs, had almost reached the hall, when something caught her foot. She fell forward, putting her arms up in an effort to protect herself. And as she fell she heard the laughter, thin, tittering, inhumanly evil, about her.

For a time she lay there, winded, and faint with pain where her left elbow had hit the floor. She heard Daniel call to her, and heard the laughter double in reply. She could see nothing, feel nothing but the hard boards against her face. Wincing from the pain, she tried to get up. But her limbs did not respond. It was as though she were Gulliver, tied to a thousand tiny stakes with thread-like ropes. Was that possible? Of course not. Then was she paralysed? She called out to Daniel for help. He replied, but it was lost in the laughter.

"Help me!" she cried desperately. "Help me!"

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The laughter was a flood which, it seemed, he could not cross. She called again, and again, and after that fell silent.

What was he doing here, Waring wondered? What conceivable point was there in this?

He had stopped actively rebelling against being a disembodied presence, finding that rebellion did no good, but the irrelevance of the present scene bothered and annoyed him. He was in a small room, on a sunny afternoon; a broad beam of light came in through one of the windows and fell on a carpet of weirdly pseudo-Oriental pattern. He knew at once that he had never seen this place before. In the distance, there was the boom of surf; the only other sound was the noisy, almost grunting exhalation of breath by the fat woman in the armchair. She was grossly, disgustingly obese, and dressed in a white costume that exposed her fat calves and, under a vee neckline, enormous leathery brown breasts, beaded with sweat. She had some kind of instrument jetting cool air at her, but it did not seem to be having much effect.

The carpet and the instrument were not the only details that were troubling. There was what seemed to be a television screen, but it was a rectangle hanging flat against the wall, and the telephone was a contraption of sinuous curves, with no sign of a dial. Furniture was a mixture of short and squat with tall and spindly, as though the room was used by two quite different races, and there was something on a table by the window to which he could not give the hint of a name. It was shaped roughly like a large shell, but made of steel and plastic in an eye-wrenching melange of colours.

He was still wondering about this when he heard another sound, a door opening. There were footsteps, the weary tread of an old man. The fat woman stirred, and called:

"Waring!"

He recognized her as the room door opened and his own self, seared with age, came in. Once you had the key, he thought with horror, it was all too easy. And this later Waring: honed to a creaking thinness of flesh pulled tight over bone—time's small skirmishing victories transformed to a lost battlefield at the close of a lingering day.

Helen said: "You've been long enough. I should have had my pill half an hour ago. You trying to kill me, or something?"

He looked at her with cold disgust. "You could have got it yourself."

"How could I, crippled the way I am?"

"You got to those candies last week, all right."

She said bitterly: "So you're still trying to make me out a liar

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about that. It was the Helper took them. I told you that."

"God Almighty, you'll put the blame on her rather than admit it! Those kids come and see to you, and maybe a hundred like you, wash and clean your stinking carcase, and don't get a dime in payment, and you'll blame her for taking the lousy candy you stuffed down your fat gullet. You make me sick with your ingratitude."

"They come because that way they don't get put on the draft for Asia. And washing me doesn't stop them liking candy."

"Just because you're rotten with selfishness, you think everyone's the same."

She cackled suddenly with laughter. "Maybe I should study you more. A fine specimen of idealistic manhood. You think I didn't see you, when she was out on the verandah yesterday, lying out there pretending to be asleep, and looking up her legs? You'd miss those little tits of hers, if she stopped coming around, wouldn't you? I've seen the saliva dripping from your mouth, watching them. You get on so well with her, why don't you ask her to let you have a feel? You could give her a bar of candy."

Waring looked down at her, his face working. He said:

"You old sow. I wish . . ."

"Wish? Wish what? Wish I was dead? Then you and old Jack could move in together, and lead a clean happy life, playing checkers together, going for walks along the beach, pretending each of you wasn't looking at the girls, the young flesh you still want and you'll never touch again. His wife's dead. Isn't it a shame yours is still hanging on, with her bad heart and all?"

Waring said quietly: "I loathe you. I wouldn't have thought it possible I could go on loathing you more and more, but I do. You'd think there must be a limit to it, but the pit's bottomless. Do I wish you were dead? You bet I do. If I believed in prayers, I'd pray for it. And you're quite right: when you are dead, I'll move in with Jack and I'll know a little peace for the last year or so before it's all over. That's the promise that keeps me going, the promise of a decent companionship. Sure, checkers, and walks along the beach, and we'll get a permit to keep a dog, since there will be the two of us. A collie, or a spaniel, or just a mutt, maybe. That's what it's going to be like—peace, peace, peace." He bent down towards her. "Why don't you die? Why don't you goddam die?"

She had a gasping, coughing fit, and he watched her. When she had finished, she said, choking:

"Get me my pill."

He looked at her with hatred for a moment longer, then turned and went to a high, narrow chest-of-drawers with painted side panels.

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He brought back a pill, with a glass of water he had filled from a carafe. She took the pill from him, put it in her mouth, and swallowed it in a draft of water with ugly gurgling noises.

Waring said: "They keep you alive, those pills, but they won't go on doing that indefinitely. Not with a heart like yours. And mine's pretty sound. Gottlieb told me that. I've got a few years yet. I look after myself."

She gasped and wheezed: "Like Jack does."

"Sure. I'll outlast you. There'll be some peace before it's over."

It looked and sounded like another coughing fit at first, but it was not that. Hideously, her whole immense body shaking, she was laughing.

"O.K., laugh," Waring said. "Give yourself an attack. It suits me fine."

She brought herself under something like control. She said:

"There was another reason I was anxious you should get back. I had a message for you. Two messages, from the Hospital. First was that Jack had had a slight coronary —he wanted you to come and see him. Second said not to bother. He had another bigger one on top of it."

Her eyes peered up at him from the folds of flesh, her mouth gaped in a grin.

"He died an hour ago." She wheezed with laughter, and rocked with the effort of it. "Never mind, honeylamb. You've still got me."

Hanni sat on the bed, shivering. It was all so vivid still—the chill grey sky with the wind bitter from the east, the wires and turrets and the long lines of huts, the crowd of faces, pinched with cold and hunger, bleak with resignation . . . and his face, looking down at the black uniform trimmed with silver. The pain of that tore her heart. A nightmare? But so real. Stefan was out of bed, too, staring at her across the room. She wondered if she had cried out, and wakened him. She tried to smile, and started to get up.

"It's all right . . ." she began, but he stopped her. His voice shaking, he said:

"What are you doing here?"

She did not understand, but started to go foreward.

"Stefan . . ."

He stopped her with a gesture, his hand raised to ward off, to block a sight, to strike. He said:

"They hanged you. I read about it, not then but later. Some of the British protested. It was not their kind of hanging, quick, with a knot in the rope to break the neck as you fell. It was a slow death—strangulation in a noose. Five minutes of agony, perhaps more. But not slow enough. Do you hear? Not slow enough . . ."

He drew breath in a sob that shuddered up from the heart. His

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hands went to cover his face, and she saw that he was weeping; it racked him like a fever. She tried to move towards him, but he saw the movement and shouted:

"Stay! Stay there." He paused, breathing heavily. "That last time, in the cell, when you spoke of Mutti's money. Clean money, you said, and she would wish me to have it. But Grandfather left as much to Aunt Hilde, and what happened to that? She used it, all of it, when Uncle Paul was ill. He would not let her go to you for help, and they had nothing put by —his promotion stopped when he refused to join the Party."

He stopped again. His eyes were fixed on her, and there was sweat on his brow. He said:

"I don't remember Uncle Paul very well. He did not visit us much after Hitler, did he? But I can remember them coming to us the summer before, and I remember sitting quietly, listening to you and him arguing together. I was late for swimming with the other boys, but I wanted to listen to you. He was a weak man, I saw—weak in body and with a weak cleverness of mind. It was you who had the strength in both. I was ten, and I could understand that. He got angry, but you did not get angry because you were sure of yourself. And I sat, and listened, and thanked God that I was your son, and not his."

The sweat fell in his eyes, and he blinked and rubbed them with the back of his hand.

"There is no clean or unclean money. Only men. And I am unclean, because you were. They hanged you, and they should have hanged me at the same time, because everything you were and had is mine. Everything. Everything."

His face showed the despair she had seen through the wires, but here there was no barrier between them. She walked towards him, and he cried:

"Stop! Or I will strangle you again."

She went to him, with her arms open. "Stefan. It's Hanni. I love you, liebchen."

He did not move, but waited, staring, until she was almost on him. Then his hands reached out and took her by the throat. They closed with terrible strength, choking her, shaking her body. She fought for breath and there was a drumming in her ears. Through it, she heard his voice:

"Only unclean men! And the uncleanness goes on from generation to generation. But ends here. Do you think I could have had children, sons, after what you were, and I was? But it ends! It ends . . ."

It was not blackness that took her, but a roaring hammering tumult of crimson. Later she was aware of darkness, and silence, and then light as her eyelids flickered. She thought at first that his hands

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were still clamped round her throat, but it was only a soreness. She swallowed, and the soreness stabbed sharply into pain. She opened her eyes fully, and with some difficulty got to her feet.

Stefan was sitting on his bed, his gaze fixed on the wall. It hurt her to speak, but she said: "Stefan . . ." He gave no sign of hearing. She went unsteadily to him, and put her hands on his shoulders. He registered nothing. She stroked his face, and there was no response. He sat stiff and unmoving. So she sat by him, and rested her head against his shoulder.

They stayed like that for a long time before he spoke. He said her name, and she ignored the pain to answer him. He said:

"I killed you, Hanni."

"No," she said. "No! I am alive. See."

"I saw you lying there. I killed you as he killed all the others. Only one death. I am a smaller man than he was. But one is enough."

"Touch me," she said. "Feel me. I am here beside you."

"And now there is nothing. I hear nothing, see nothing. And yet exist. Why do I exist, Hanni? You are wise; tell me that."

She tried to pull his face round to kiss him, but the rigidity of his body was too much for her strength.

"Forgive me," he said.

"There is nothing to forgive. I love you."

"Forgive me. Without that, I am damned."

She found herself weeping. "I forgive you," she said. "And so do the others, all of them. Sophie and Ruth, Evchen and Esther. And Aunt Miriam and Aunt Sarah and Aunt Eva. They all forgive you. There is no bitterness. And I love you, I love you!"

"No light," he said. "No light, no sound but the sound of my own voice. Nothing. I cannot even see your body any longer. I see nothing, hear nothing, touch nothing. And yet I live still."

Weeping, she said: "I am here, and I love you."

"Forgive me," he said. "Only forgive!"

The lights faded from the sky as they walked hand in hand away from the house, and as they faded there were the ordinary stars, and in the east a brightness—not dawn, but the rising of the moon. Mat said:

"The show seems to be over. Do you want to go back?"

Cherry shook her head. "No. I'd sooner stay, now we're out. What do you think's been happening tonight? Atom bombs? A war somewhere?"

"I don't think so."

Nor care, he thought. There was a terrible selfishness about an alliance like this; one pitied more people, but one pitied them with detachment. A wall round two

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people instead of one, and the stronger for that. Because one was no longer lonely behind the barricade, no longer moved by the self-treachery which breached the wall in the hope that the one who stormed it would be friend not foe.

She said: "All that shaking, and then the lights, and yet nothing's happened."

He pressed her hand. "Everything."

"I know. But you're not saying it was laid on for us? Like the Ides of March."

He laughed. "No, I'm not saying that."

"Here's a place to sit. Under this tree. We can watch the moon."

They settled with their backs to the trunk of the oak, Cherry snuggled up to him, with his arm over her shoulder. She said:

"It would be nice to have some champagne."

"I thought you didn't drink."

"Not many things. But I like the taste of champagne. Why do you drink so much?"

He told her: of the drunken years and the sober years, and of what had precipitated the latest bout. She listened, calm, attentive, loving. She said:

"You're an unstable character."

"That's right."

"Like me. Do you think anyone would bet a dime on our future?"

"No one with any sense."

"An alcoholic and a nymphomaniac."

He brought a hand up to stop her mouth. "You can call me names, but not my love."

"I am, aren't I?"

"Yes."

"And you're mine. What chance do you think we have?"

"One worth taking. Nothing else is."

"That's true, anyway. You know what—I think we've got a pretty good chance, really. I think maybe we're the kind of people who need to have something to be strong *for*. And this is it."

"Yes," he said. "This is it."

They talked on, while the moon rose. It was an easy rambling conversation, wandering away into irrelevancies but always coming back to the shining centre. Sometimes they lapsed into silences as undemanding as the talk. He thought, during one of these, of Bridget, and tried to recall what it was he had felt for her. All he could think of was the unsureness, the insecurity. It was strange—to have thought then of Bridget surrendering her body to a man, to any man at any time, would have been to plunge into a fiery sea of jealousy. Whereas, while he accepted what Cherry had told him, and was not trying to forget it, to push it out of sight, it made no difference. He would not have thought he could feel such a wholeness.

He said: "You give me strength."

"And you're going to need it.

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But me, too. We boost each other. Terrific. We're going to make a great team. Especially with the children."

"Yes." It was a startling idea but, he saw at once, a good one. "How many?"

"We'll see. Lots, I think. They say the world is overpopulated, and I say the hell with them."

He laughed. "You know, at first I thought what a quiet little girl you were, with nothing to say."

"I have been." She smiled up at him. "But I talked to myself a lot. Look, it's still bright over there, and the moon's way up. Sunrise? Oughtn't the birds to have started singing?"

"Irish birds. They sleep late."

There was a single chirp somewhere in the branches overhead. She giggled.

"He heard you."

"That's all right. Comment inside the family doesn't count."

"Like us,"

"Like us," he agreed.

They watched the sun come up, and heard the birds wake and sing. At last, she said:

"It's ordinary day. The magic part's over."

"We might as well go back."

He got up, and helped lift her. She said:

"Do you mind it being ordinary?"

He shook his head. "Do you?"

She did not answer till they were walking back across the grass to the house. Then, smiling into the sun, she said:

"No. I like the day better."

When Bridget broke away from him, and ran down the stairs, Daniel started to follow her, but he went cautiously, his hand on the rail, calling to her to stop, not to be a fool and plunge ahead like that. He could not think what had possessed her to do such a thing, and was beginning to be angry when he heard, simultaneously, the sound of her crashing to the floor and the swell of piping laughter from the darkness before him. He stopped then, his hand gripping the banister, and called again.

"Brid? What's happened? Are you all right?"

A renewal of the laughter was the only answer. It seemed louder, as though they were coming up the stairs towards him, and automatically he backed away, climbing two or three steps backwards towards the landing.

It had been a trap of some kind, and Bridget had fallen into it. If he rushed down, the only result would be that two would be trapped instead of one. Which meant that he would have no chance of rescuing her. It was as he had told her in Mrs. Malone's room; one had to think before acting. But he could not think clearly. Thoughts spun inconsequentially through his mind, slip-

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ping from him when he tried to force them into logic.

Then he heard her call his name, and heard his own inane reply: "Are you all right?" He was not sure whether she had heard him through the mocking oscillating laughter, but he heard her.

"Help me . . . help me . . ."

He took a step down, and the laughter seemed nearer. He stopped. Bridget is down there, he told himself. She needs help. He tried to will himself into the act of charging forward into the blackness, but the intention was swamped in his mind by a picture of being brought down as she had been, of lying helpless while small merciless figures tortured and tormented him. He had feared spiders from childhood, and all the weight of that fear and horror now transferred to these—but these were larger than spiders, swifter, intelligent and malign.

She called again, and he knew that the instant of decision was on him. There was no holding back on the excuse of taking thought. If it were Mrs. Malone down there, or an unknown stranger, one could not hold back. And it was Bridget, whom he had said he loved, and believed the word was true. Whatever the horror, however great his fear, he must go to her. He tensed himself for that, and as he did so heard the laughter close, so close, just in front of his feet, it seemed. And he turned and ran.

He blundered, sobbing, along the landing, found his room, stumbled in and slammed the door behind him. For a time he stood with his forearms pressed against the panel, holding it against any attempt to force it. Later he slumped to the ground, and sat with his back to the door. He felt exhausted, as though he had run a long race, and his mind, too, was drained to a near emptiness. The laughter had stopped, and so had the cries. There was absolute stillness all round him. He would have heard her if she had still been crying out. Whatever was happening to her had stopped. Or was finished. He found tears running down his cheeks, and wondered whether he was weeping for her, or for himself.

Later, he slept. When he awoke, light was showing from the window; it was almost sunrise. The world of shadows was passing, yielding to the world of objects; he saw and marvelled at the hardness of shape of a bed, a chair, a wardrobe. After a time, he got up, and rubbed and stretched the cramp from his body.

It was darker on the landing, but still light enough to see his way quite easily, and the stairs were brighter. He came to the top and looked down, steeling his mind to what might be there. What he saw was Bridget's body stretched out in the hall, face down, with one hand under her head, the

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other limp in front of her. A slipper had come off, showing a white unmoving foot. And round her . . .

They stood roughly in a semicircle about her head, a few feet from her. They were looking at her with their calm and empty eyes. They were very small against her body. He felt anger kindle in him as it had never done before; not just anger, but the need to maim, to kill, to destroy utterly. It was something his body and mind craved for, like lust or hunger. Slowly, not wishing to disturb them too soon, he started to descend the stairs.

They saw him, and their gaze turned to him, but they did not move. They stayed till he was among them, only scattering when the first kick sent one of them spinning to crash against the wall. Then they darted and ran and he kicked and cursed and sobbed and kicked, half blind with nausea and fury, until a cry stopped him. Not from them; they had been wholly silent. Bridget's voice. He turned and saw her struggling to get up. She said:

"I'm cramped."

He helped her to rise. She found it difficult to stand upright; he was ready to support her, but she turned from him and clutched the pillar at the foot of the stairs. She said:

"They're going."

He followed the direction of her gaze. The door to the cellar stairs was open, and two of them were half carrying, half dragging a third small body through it. Involuntarily, with no clear motivation, Daniel made a move to follow them, but now she put a hand out, and grasped his arm.

"Let them go," she said harshly. "You've done enough."

It was a clear bright morning, after a clear dark night. The weather would break soon, but the clouds heralding the storm were still half an ocean away; here a blue sky was ruled by the life-giving, light-giving sun, his pallid sister no more than a small wafer of white by comparison. The rulers of the earth went about their business—men to work, children to school, housewives to the care of their homes. All was seen, heard, touched, and understood. Where one sense failed, or was insufficient, others filled out the picture. This was a world of fact, and inference from fact. Fancy had no place here. It might, for a moment, touch the mind, culled from a book, a picture, a vagrant thought, but it could not stay. The sun withered it and dismissed it.

The rulers of the day went about the day's business. The creatures of the night skulked in their holes.

The revels were ended.

XVI

They sat, except for Bridget and

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the Morwitzes, over coffee, and talked. Daniel wondered if the others felt as shaken and diminished as he did. They did not show it, but perhaps he did not, either. He hoped he did not. He said, striving for lightness of tone:

"It must be something to do with extra-sensory perception. Getting into our minds, and controlling them."

Waring said: "Well, of course, ESP has been demonstrated intermittently in human beings. And it's been suggested more than once that it's not so much a case of ESP being a plus factor as its absence being a negative one. That there's some kind of barrier or filter in the normal human mind which normally stops it operating. There have been reports of a high incidence of apparent telepathy in psychotics."

"You regard them as psychotics?" Mat asked.

"I don't know. But one of the marks of the psychotic is a divorce between action and emotion—and they show that. It's possible that emotions don't exist for them. Growth is controlled by the pituitary gland which anatomically is directly connected to the hypothalamus; and the hypothalamus is the part of the brain associated with the emotions. Stunting one could mean stunting the other."

"They never smiled or laughed," Cherry said. "Does that mean anything?"

Daniel said: "I heard them laugh." The memory of it shivered through his head; he thought it always would. "And doesn't the fact of tormenting people imply some kind of emotion?"

"Not really," Waring said. "It could be imitative, a reflecting back of Seamus' little games. The laughter could be, too—he probably laughed at them. And did you hear the laughter, really hear it? How much was real last night, and how much illusion? Very much more the latter, I would guess."

"There seem to have been so many different illusions going," Mat said. "All that Cherry and I felt was the rocking, and saw the lights in the sky."

They had come in together from outside while Daniel and Bridget were staring at each other in the empty hall. He had been glad to see anyone who could provide an opportunity for him to look away. Only now, seeing the glance that passed between them, did he understand that they had become lovers. So many different illusions . . .

Waring said, not very comfortably: "Yes. And we don't know what happened with the Morwitzes, except that it looks like it was pretty bad. She's not talking, and he's a very sick man."

Daniel said: "The rats . . . they could not explain to Stefan how they killed them. Could they have done it this way—getting into their minds, do you think?"

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"Most likely," Waring said. "The cats as well."

Cherry said, puzzled: "In that case, why let Seamus do all those things to them? They could have got into his mind, and stopped him. Couldn't they?"

"We don't know how it works," Waring said, "but it must be very largely conditioned by suggestion. It's not so much a question of the power you've got as the power you think you have. I've seen a wolfhound back away from a kitten. Seamus was god to them, as Hofricht had been. That's a pretty inhibiting thing, as far as the exercise of faculties of this sort is concerned. Then the god crawled away, stricken. They went down to the cellars and encountered the rats. They tried using whips on them first, and found that they could reach into their minds and —who knows? Frighten them to death? The cats, as well."

Mat said: "We should have guessed something about the—telepathy, from the way they came out to Greta's call. The boat must have been ready and manned. That implies either a pretty big coincidence, or that she was in touch with them all the time."

"And told them we were harmless," Waring said. "I agree."

Daniel said: "Then why did they wait so long before they attempted to . . . control us?"

Waring shrugged. "I can think of a lot of reasons. One fairly obvious one is that we were made in the image of Seamus the God. They probably didn't imagine they could do anything—at least, not until they picked up the smell of fear in Mrs. Malone. And, as I say, suggestion must have a lot to do with it. At night, during sleep particularly, the mind could be fairly easily moulded. It's different when the senses are fully operating. They didn't try to do anything to your mind when you were running amok among them, did they? They just picked up their wounded, and crawled away."

Bridget had come to the door while Waring was talking. Daniel was acutely aware of her presence, but could not bring himself to look in her direction. She said:

"The influence was very strong while it was operating. Daniel and I were convinced the electricity fuses had blown. Did we only think we tried the switches, or did we actually switch the lights on and still see nothing, even with light all round us?"

Waring shook his head. "God knows."

Cherry asked: "How are they?"

"The Morwitzes? Well, the doctor's coming, but it's fifteen miles. We managed to get him into bed. He's not responding to anything."

Waring said: "It sounds like an acute onset of schizophrenia."

"Caused by them?" Mat asked.

"Precipitated. It's most likely constitutional."

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"Poor devils."

Mat spoke, Daniel reflected, with an agreeably detached compassion, his melancholic world transformed to one of elation. Temporarily, anyway.

Bridget said: "Hanni won't say much, but I think theirs was something to do with the war. Worse than ours, I imagine, though ours was bad enough. The completeness was the terrifying thing, the utter reality, and one only realizes now how complete it was. For instance, why didn't it occur to either Daniel or me to wake someone else up? You, for instance, Waring, or Mat. It would have been an obvious thing to do. And then there was the paralysis. Neither of us able to move a muscle, though God knows we tried hard enough."

Mat said: "It's not surprising that when Daniel found he could move, he went a bit wild."

"Not a bit surprising," Bridget said.

Her voice was brisk. One compulsion overcame another in Daniel's mind, and he looked towards her. She was looking in his direction, and smiling, an ordinary smile of sympathy and interest. For the others, though not for him, it effectively disguised the truth: that she knew him now as she had never done before, and despised what she knew.

He said: "There are one or two things I want to do upstairs, if you'll all excuse me."

She made room for him to pass her; just that little more than was necessary.

Bridget left for the kitchen not long after Daniel had gone. The four remained. Waring stared at his empty coffee cup and, after a moment, shook the vacuum jug. There was a little left. He offered it to the others, who refused it, so he poured some for himself. It was almost cold. They had been sitting here a long time, but he could not think of anything better to do. Anything at all, in fact. The talking, explaining, hypothesizing had not changed or lessened his sense of being drained and empty of purpose. He wondered about Helen. She had been saying very little, almost nothing, her face mask-like and unrevealing. She had been with him at the beginning; he was sure of that. But later?

The one question nagged at him. It was the only thing that was important now. What the little people were, how they operated, what would become of them—his own relationship to them, even—were arid problems whose answers could not move him. That other coloured everything. He could not discuss it with Helen, and in any case what could she say that would resolve it?

Cherry said: "Will they come back?"

Mat shrugged. "Who knows?

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They must be badly wounded, shocked."

Cherry shuddered. "All that blood . . . I know we didn't go through anything bad—and I know it must have been pretty bad—but all the same . . ."

"Try to forget it," Mat said. He stretched, tilting his chair back. "We could go for a walk, get some fresh air."

"Sure." She smiled, and he smiled in return. "But how about breaking the news first?"

"Ought I not to ask for an interview with your father, to start?"

Waring looked up. It took him an appreciable time to work out the implications, and when he did he presumed it must be a joke. An odd joke, and an odd occasion to choose, but still—. He saw Helen's face. There was expression in it now, the familiar lines of anger, but surely she could not be taking it seriously?

Cherry said: "No point in that. I'll tell them." She glanced quickly at her parents' faces, and back to Mat. "We've decided we're going to be married."

He realized with sudden alarm that she meant it. Behind her smile there was a rare seriousness of intent. He started to say something, but Helen cut in ahead of him.

"It adds a nice touch of romance to the story. But have you forgotten how old you are? Or young?"

"Seventeen," Cherry said. "Aren't I lucky?"

Waring remembered his own earlier thoughts about Cherry and the Irishman, but it was impossible to recapture, or understand, the feelings of approval that had gone with them. Cherry lost to him—married, in Ireland, an ocean away? The idea panicked him so that he felt his throat tighten. What would he do without her? What would they do?

Mat said: "I'm ten years older, Mrs. Selkirk. I'll look after her."

"You." The scorn in Helen's look was the sharper for being fleeting. "When you're not on the bottle."

With less ebullience, but in level tones, Cherry said:

"This is not doing a lot of good, Mom. I've done pretty much as you wanted before, because there hasn't been anything that mattered. But this matters."

"As I wanted? My God, that's great!" She swung round to Mat. "Listen, I'll tell you something."

She could not, Waring thought—not possibly. He stared at her in nausea and fascination. Her eyes, in the fat face, were hard and cold. She said:

"So you had a lot of fun last night. Pretty lights in the sky. You got yourself laid, I guess, and I doubt if that's happened to you before very much, if at all. An Irish cock-virgin, with a dry throat. But Cherry's a different proposition."

Mat broke in: "She's your daughter."

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"Don't I know it? And seventeen. And for three years she's been putting out for every male that showed an interest. Do you know she was sent back from summer camp last year, for corrupting the other girls? Do you know only a week before we made this trip I came back early and found her with the delivery man from the dry cleaners? How long do you think what you've got is going to keep her interested? I'll tell you. Until the next male with an itch comes along. Marriage. My God, I don't know whether to laugh or vomit."

She had beaten down attempts by Mat to get a word in. He ignored her now, and stood up. He said to Cherry:

"Come on, my love. We'll go for that walk."

"You can't do it!" Helen shouted. "You can't. I won't let you. I'll get a court order!"

Cherry had got up with him, and took the hand he offered her. He turned back to Helen.

"You're sick," he said. "That's a good enough reason for taking Cherry away from you, quite apart from anything else."

"You don't believe me, but you'll find out!"

He ignored her. To Cherry, he said: "Fresh air. It will do us good."

They went out, and Helen stared at Waring.

"What the hell good are you? Why didn't you do something?"

He said: "You did that to her. Even though I said it, I didn't think it was possible. You'd tear her heart out, rather than let her get away from you and be happy."

"Happy? A set-up like that?"

"You did that to her."

She was silent, and he wondered if, for once, she was going to admit her guilt. Not that admission could detract from it in any way. Then she said softly:

"You didn't stop me."

"I couldn't. Nor could Mat."

"At least he tried. You could have hit me, and stopped me. There was time enough and you've hit me before. But you just sat there. And you know why? Because you were glad I was saying it. You talk a lot about how much you love her, but it doesn't mean anything. All that—I was doing it for you, and you know it."

Staring at her, he stared at himself. The question dominated everything, the question that he could not ignore, nor evade. How much had been real, and how much illusion? The past they had shown him had been real, but all that had involved had been access to his memory. The events had taken place and were stored in the brain; there was nothing improbable about tapping them. But the future? Could they read that, and show it to him—drape the shadow of that terminus over every day of the thirty pointless years to come? He would not believe it.

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And yet, contemplating himself, what he had already become, he knew he could neither deny nor escape what lay ahead.

The ambulance took Stefan away in the early afternoon. Hanni had packed their things, and went with him.. He had not spoken for hours, had given no indication that he could hear or see or sense anything. Bridget stood for a while watching the ambulance crawl away along the potholed track, and then went back to the house. In the kitchen, Mrs. Malone was washing lettuce in the sink, tunelessly humming a popular song. Looking at her, Bridget could hear again those screams of utter anguish, that voice calling for help in agony. Those sounds had been as real as these. And yet it seemed that neither she nor Mary had experienced anything strange. By her own account, Mrs. Malone had spent a peaceful, dreamless night in her bed—that bed which she and Daniel had looked at and seen empty. Was there any reality at all, she thought despairingly? I think, therefore I am. But what if my inmost thoughts deceive me?

She told Mary to tell the guests she would like to see them all in the drawing room. Daniel came in last, and stood near the back. Bridget said:

"Lunch is going to be a bit scrappy, I'm afraid. Just some cold cuts, with jacket potatoes and a salad. Afterwards . . . there's quite a good hotel in Ballina which can take anyone who wants to stay. Naturally, there will be no bills to pay."

Waring said: "That's not right. We insist."

Bridget smiled. "Anyone who insists can pay pro rata for the time they've been here."

"You are closing the place up?" Mat said.

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"For good."

"And the little people?"

"Can have possession. If any story gets out, I shall deny it. I hope the rest of you will do the same. This will remain my property legally, and I don't propose to issue invitations, either to reporters, camera-men, or"—she glanced at Waring—"eminent scientists."

Waring said: "Yes." He paused. "You're probably doing the right thing."

Bridget was surprised; it was from Waring that she had expected opposition. The situation, it was true, was slightly different—one could understand there being less keenness to conduct studies and experiments on creatures who had shown they could conduct experiments on you—but she would not have thought it enough to bring about this change. Something was obsessing him. The possible loss of a daughter? That

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seemed unlikely, too, but one could never tell.

The others, she thought, would cause no difficulty. Certainly not Cherry. And Helen and Mat had been in favour of leaving them alone even before last night. Daniel . . . all Daniel wanted was to forget the whole thing, to get back to his familiar world.

"What will you do, yourself?" Mat asked.

"I'll stay around long enough to find a place for Mrs. Malone and Mary. Then I think I'll go into a catering school." She smiled. "I enjoyed this until it got too complicated."

It was, in fact, as far as she could see, going to be easy. She had enough money to keep herself in Lausanne for a year or two, and she had no doubts about finding herself a place after that. She had a feeling she was going to be quite successful. The abandonment of Cousin Seamus' legacy was no hardship, and what else had she lost? Nothing material. Merely the feeling that one could trust oneself to another human being, at any time, under any circumstances. That was not important, surely. One could get along much better without it. Nor need the loss make one an inferior person. One had responsibilities—toward Mrs. Malone and Mary, for example—and one handled them better where there was no question of love or self-deception.

Cherry said: "What will happen to them?"

"The little people? I should imagine they will be all right. They will have the place to themselves, and there's enough food in to last them for some time."

One could also, she thought, arrange to have more stuff brought in from time to time. Another responsibility? Certainly best viewed unemotionally, if so.

"You don't think they'll sort of —spread out?" Cherry asked.

Waring answered her. "I doubt it. They've been conditioned by one room, remember. I think their horizons are pretty small, and will stay that way. And this place is far enough off the track."

"Their descendants, maybe?" Mat suggested.

"I'd be surprised if there were any. Where the pituitary has been taken out in animals, the sex function has been lost. I would say they're incapable of reproduction."

"So there's no menace to the world waiting to come out of the Killabeg Bog," Mat said. "Nor could there be, anyway. Poor little devils. They may cast terror by night, but when the sun rises, a few kicks disperse them."

Cherry, who had been standing beside him, moved closer, and their hands touched and clasped. Helen, Bridget saw, was watching. She was addressing Waring and Cherry, her voice slightly raised: "We'll drive to Dublin, and take

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a plane to France. Then motor on down to Italy, maybe."

Cherry said: "Not me."

Helen bared her teeth in a smile. "You too, baby."

"I don't mind going to Dublin. We're getting married as soon as Mat can get a licence."

"Did he tell you that? He's a liar, as well as a seducer. You're under age and can't marry without consent. He's a lawyer and knows that."

"There's something else he knows," Waring said. "I've told them I'm giving my consent. Which I gather is enough."

Helen stared at him. "I don't get it. What do you think you're doing —running for Father of the Year?"

Waring said: "I think when you can't win, there's no point in going on fighting. And I think you know that, too. Let's do it gracefully, eh, honey? And then settle down to the Darby and Joan life."

Helen said, in a surprisingly quiet voice: "You'll regret this."

"I don't think so."

"What do you think you saw last night?" she said, "a light on the road to Damascus?"

"No," Waring said. "Not a light. Maybe a vision of judgement." He smiled emptily at her. "We're losing Cherry but we've got each other, honey. That's really as much as we need."

Helen continued to gaze at him, but did not reply. Bridget said:

"So we have cause to celebrate? There's a bottle of champagne in the fridge. Can you get it, Daniel?"

"Yes, of course."

He avoided her eye. She had a moment of feeling bereft as he went out, but the loss was not of him, nor even of love, but of something else. Of the pain she should have felt. She told herself how absurd this was. Self-sufficiency was an admirable thing and, in any case, nothing really had changed. She was the person she always had been; she merely knew herself better.

Daniel brought the champagne in, and opened it. The drink fizzed in the glasses. The desolation would pass; it was passing already. There would be times when it would return, probably, but life was full of a number of things that could be used to keep it at bay. She smiled at Daniel as he gave her a glass, and thanked him.

Bridget thought about the little people, hiding in their holes and binding up their wounds. They had brought gifts, she saw. Madness, and self-knowledge—or were those two the same? No, she thought: I am sane enough. Just a little unhappy, but it won't last. And perhaps, after all, they had given people what they most wanted, what they were capable of taking.

"A toast, then." She lifted her glass, and the bubbles danced up in a ray of sunshine from the window. "Long life and happiness to the loving couple." ◄

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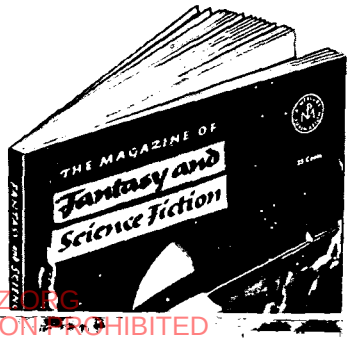

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